University of Alberta

Unexpected Encounters: Brazilian Journeys and Poetical Re-discoveries in the Works of Elizabeth Bishop, P. K. Page, and Jan Conn

by

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Abstract

One of the main questions that guides this work is the relation between travel and representation, or how, in particular historical and material conditions, travellers represent themselves and others in cross-cultural encounters. This thesis presents a reading of how three North American poets, Elizabeth Bishop, P.K. Page, and Jan Conn, re-construct images of self and other in their travels in South America, specifically in Brazil. It also investigates how such re-constructions still dialogue with narratives of the past (mostly with the colonial discourse of discovery and exploration). In their works, these poets offer an opportunity for further readings of what James Clifford has called "the writing of cultures." Although these poets' journeys allow a questioning of the "constructedness" of poetical representations, they do not necessarily approach travel as only a space for celebration and self-assuredness. This thesis reads the crossing of borders more as a contested movement (both mapping and un-mapping crossed locations) than as a route for an unproblematic interplay between traveller and travelled destination. Thus, this study analyzes these poets' representations of Brazil through their ambivalences and complexities. Though Brazil is not usually seen as a North American other, these three poets' literary re-constructions of this place are a significant part of their poetics. Their encounters with the "unexpected" space Brazil opens for them offer critical readings of their strategies to negotiate and represent difference and a discussion of how their poetics "coincide" or "speak to" one another. This thesis is divided into two main parts. Part 1 explores Elizabeth Bishop's lifelong concerns with geography and travel. Writing during the 1950s, mainly from Brazil, Bishop breaks new ground in her poetical considerations and helps to create a frame for the reading of both Page's and

Conn's later representations of the country. Part 2 approaches P. K. Page's and Jan Conn's poetical re-discoveries of the subjective traveller. While Page's writing offers a reflection on the transformations of the self in cultural encounters, Conn's poetry focuses on the relations between "inner" and "outer" landscapes. I conclude with a reading of these poets' literary connections.

For Felipe, for everything…

"Within the glow that weaves a cloak of delight

There moves a thread that has no end..."

"All of my love," *R. Plant and J.P. Jones*

Preface and Acknowledgements

"Is it lack of imagination that makes us come
To imagined places, not just stay at home?"
"Questions of Travel," Elizabeth Bishop

Elizabeth Bishop, one of the poets whose writing is the focus of this present work, is famous for her life-long interest in geography, the crossing of borders, and her "questions of travel." The above epigraph, part of a well-known and widely-quoted poem she wrote after living in Brazil for a few years, speaks to me for a variety of reasons. It not only allows me to reflect on Bishop's poetics but also on my own journeys, the paths I have followed in life, the imagination informing the borders I have crossed. When I was a child, travelling abroad was not necessarily part of my immediate and tangible world. Distances (between home and anywhere, be it my school, the city-centre or the seashore) seemed enormous. At the same time, news from different places, other countries or regions, also populated my childhood imagination. I used to hear stories from great-grandparents crossing the ocean, leaving behind places such as Germany or Italy, looking for new land, new life opportunities, or even running away from war. I used to hear about a grandfather who did not seem to like living in the same place for too long, and would constantly move away with his family to different regions and cities in the south of Brazil. I used to hear pieces of different languages, words pronounced with pride, accents, parts of Italian songs sang to me with care and love, or lines from a Bible written in German read by a grandmother who would astonish me with her skills. Even if I had never profoundly thought of such intricacies and connections, part of this awareness for the acts of "moving" and encountering different places and cultures stayed with me since then.

Looking back to my trajectory and interests, I can see now I have always been curious to learn about encounters, identities and how people represent themselves and others in their many moves throughout life. It was probably this curiosity that led me to dive in the study of another language during university, other literatures during my Master's course, or other cultures when I decided to come to Canada to continue my studies in the PhD program. My own encounter with Elizabeth Bishop, P.K. Page, and Jan Conn, the three poets I write about in this thesis, reflects such interests. When I arrived in Canada, away from my culture and family, my thoughts went "back home" and guided me to writers who would also be curious about reflecting on the acts of travelling and representing difference. In this context, my choices in this thesis are informed by such encounters and may be read as results of what James Clifford has called "thinking historically" or, in other words, a "process of locating oneself in space and time" (*Routes* 11). "And a location," for this critic, "is an itinerary rather than a bounded site – a series of encounters and translations" (*Routes* 11). This thesis is for me, then, a series of connecting moments between "here" and "there," "North" and "South," "home" and "away."

Fortunately, this itinerary is not only marked by the many solitary hours in front of computers or books but also by the many people who have crossed my paths, and whom I would like to acknowledge here. I first thank my husband, Felipe, for being by my side at every moment, holding my hand, keeping me sane, and reminding me that living, laughing and loving are all part of becoming who we are. I send a special 'thank you' (with a load of love) for my parents, Renato and Tereza, who have always been my "Happy Harbour," my safe haven, the inspiration for so many dreams and accomplishments. I also send a *baita abraço* and a *homem-pássaro* to my brother Júnior, a myriad of hugs and kisses to my grandmother Anna, a prayer to my grandparents Natal, Sybila and Bernardo, and many many thanks to my aunts, uncles, cousins, my parents in-law, my sisters and brothers in-law and their children – you are all the best gifts I ever had. I also thank, from the bottom of my heart, all of our friends (from Brazil, from Canada, or from around the world) who thought of us, missed us, emailed us, shared their time with us, fed us, made us laugh, drove us around, phoned us, and also became part of who we are today. In other words, thank you for visiting us, literally or in thoughts, many times during these five years.

I also specially thank my supervisor, Professor Jonathan L. Hart, whose expertise, guidance, support, and encouragement were essential for the completion of this thesis. I thank Professors Stephen Slemon and Cecily Devereux for being part of my supervisory committee, Professor Albert Braz and my friend Renée Ward, for their encouragement and for thinking of me when they encountered Jan Conn's poetry, Professor Neil Besner for suggesting I should come to Canada to continue my studies, and the staff from the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta. Last, but not least, I thank the Brazilian agency CAPES for the scholarship received, which allowed me to complete this graduate course.

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List of Abbreviations

Elizabeth Bishop:

CP – The Complete Poems: 1927-1979.

CPr – The Collected Prose

EAP – Edgar Allan Poe and the Juke Box

OA – One Art: Letters

P. K. Page:

BJ – Brazilian Journal

HL – Hand Luggage

HR – The Hidden Room

Jan Conn:

FDO – Fabulous Disguise of Ourselves

JR – Jaguar Rain: the Margaret Mee Poems

RSR – Red Shoes in the Rain

STBC – South of the Tudo Bem Café

WDDL – What Dante Did with Loss

Introduction – Travel Encounters: Questions of Recognition

Between 1957 and 1959, the Canadian poet P.K. Page lived in Brazil with her husband, Ambassador Arthur Irwin, who was posted there. During their time in the country, Page wrote a journal about her experiences in this place, which was the basis for a book, published almost thirty years later, by the name of *Brazilian Journal*. In this work, Page narrates many stories about her life in Brazil, and also about her impressions of the land and its people. However, before talking about these experiences, it is best to start with what she calls, in her book, "Foretaste:" a taste of what is to come, of her impressions and expectations when she was told Brazil was her next post. Thus, she writes:

> A. said, "We're posted to Brazil."
>
> (Nuts. There's an awful lot of coffee in.) "Brazil?" I said, unbelieving.
>
> [. . .]
>
> I find it hard now to remember why Brazil fell on my heart with so heavy a thud.
>
> [. . .]
>
> During the preceding weeks we had tried, not very successfully, to shop for cottons and learn the rudiments of Portuguese from gramophone records. [. . .] I could form no very clear picture of the life ahead. Leaning on the rail of the S.S. *Brazil* and watching the skyscrapered skyline of New York recede, diminish, fade into the horizon, I felt that everything familiar was receding with it.
>
> "Aren't you *afraid* of going to Brazil?" the wife of one of our senior diplomats had asked me, shortly before we left. And I had answered honestly enough that, no,

> I was not afraid. "Well, I would be!" was her rejoinder. I hadn't enquired why. I didn't want to add her fears to my doubts. (1-2)[1]

The image of an "unfamiliar dream" which Brazil represents to Page at this moment of preparation to her "trip" seems to permeate her first feelings about a country she is not very certain about. The many (or, better, the lack of) different images of Brazil is probably one of the reasons for her apparent apprehension about it at the beginning, feeling the country like a "heavy thud." Her expectations, her concerns about buying cotton, and her desire for learning a little Portuguese are feelings which are all mixed with her impression that everything familiar to her is left behind as soon as the North American coast fades away in the horizon when her journey starts.

Travelling and encountering (and why not say "overcoming") uncertainties is one of the topics that permeates this present work. In the same way that Page is preparing herself to face difference and the unexpected, this work is also interested in raising some awareness to notions of otherness, but more specifically to how difference and otherness are represented or approached through the eyes of contemporary travellers.[2] These representations do not come (happen) as naturally as one might think, though. They are usually embedded in a "loss of certainties" that inform them and re-define relations between "home" and "away."

In these redefinitions of concepts, language becomes an important question as well. Many are the passages in Page's book, for example, where she talks about language, describing moments of inability to communicate or even to understand the reality around her. It is in one of the essays she writes when she comes back from Brazil that her feelings about both the loss and acquisition of language are expressed. In "Questions and Images," Page argues that Brazil was her

---

[1] Throughout *Brazilian Journal*, Page refers to her husband as A., an abbreviation for Arthur.

[2] Although many critics and theorists use capital letters for terms such as otherness, other, or self, I do not use them in this thesis since I do not want to suggest a unified view of self and other as fixed or unitary entities. I approach these terms in their fluidity and constant exchange, particularly in relation to travel encounters.

> first foreign language – to live in, that is – and the personality changes that accompany it. One is a toy at first, a doll. Then a child. Gradually, as vocabulary increases, an adult again. But a different adult. Who am I, then, that language can so change me? What is personality, identity?
>
> [. . .]
>
> Looking back with my purely psychological eye through the long clear topaz of that day, I appear as a mute observer, an inarticulate listener, occupying another part of myself. ("Questions and Images" 187-188).

Page's travelling experience silences the writer. For most of the time she is in Brazil, she finds herself unable to write about her experience in a foreign language, and even English seems not enough to represent what she sees, listens, and experiences. In her travels to Brazil, she experiences the other's culture, but she feels she is not able to describe it, translate it, or "order" it with words. Although in many instances of her journal she seems even a little "hasty" when interpreting what she sees around her, when trying to poetically write about these experiences, her own language fails her, as if she does not know how to use (or write about) ideas, sounds, smells, and people she cannot make real sense of.

For some people it may come as a surprise that travel and encountering another culture can bring so much anxiety. The acts of travelling and writing are generally connected to ideas of inspiration, adventure, pleasure, and even a certain kind of freedom to go anywhere (wherever one wants) or to write about any topic in one's imagination (whatever comes to one's mind).[3] Travel and writing are not such free categories as they may seem, though. When Page has to face a different and maybe "un-imagined" world, with a language she cannot understand that easily, English words seem to vanish in her attempts to write down or put some order to her experience. Translating her other into words is a very difficult exercise for her, especially through a public venue as poetry itself. Many times in her journal she mentions her inability to write poetry, as if the experience of such a "surreal world" (*BJ* 9) destabilizes her own language and understanding. Nevertheless, despite a lack of poetical writing, her words seem to come in a private domain, as her journal (which is eventually published), and the other gets, sooner or later, written and translated in what Page calls "my Brazil."

Page's narrative about her experience in Brazil is just one of a great number of accounts which involve travelling and representing, or encountering otherness. Images of "someone else's" country (in Page's sense of "my Brazil"), culture, region, city, or continent are constantly being produced by travellers around the world. Despite some awareness of the subjectivity of these images, questions regarding the kinds of representations produced through the eyes (and minds) of travellers have been the centre of many literary, philosophical, and critical debates lately. Even the trope of travel itself has become a very important category in debates on the production and understanding of cultural identities.

In his introduction to *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel*, Michael Kowalewski emphasizes the relevance of critical readings on travel, and points out that it is exactly the challenges imposed on travel writing (mainly related to a traveller's attempt to write about a culture not being part of that same culture) that has attracted a great number of travel writers (2-3). In this context, Page's personal challenges to writing about Brazil in her journal can definitely be approached as permeated by contemporary discussions about the modes of representation embedded in the acts of travelling and writing on other cultures. Moreover, for Kowalewski, such acts usually "blend outward, spatial aspects of travel (social observation and evocations of alien settings and sensibilities) with the inward, temporal forms of memory and recollection" (9). In this sense, the question of perception and the awareness of the limitations of knowledge in travel also "initiate," according to Kowalewski, "a humbling but not paralyzing self-examination" (10). The relation between self and other becomes, then, one of the underlying narratives of the writing on travel.

---

[3] In his discussion on travel in *The Mind of the Traveler*, Eric Leed, for example, argues that in modernity travel is usually associated with freedom or with a potential access to the new. Leed argues that, while "[t]he ancients valued travel as an explication of human fate and necessity; for moderns, it is an expression of freedom and an escape from necessity and purpose" (7).

For writers such as James Clifford, although "roots always precede routes" in the understanding and analysis of questions of cultural formation and identity, travel could be faced as "a complex and pervasive spectrum of human experience" so that "[p]ractices of displacement might emerge as *constitutive* of cultural meanings rather than as their simple transfer or extension" (*Routes* 3). Instead of focusing only on dwelling as the meaningful space for cultural practices, Clifford argues that one should pay more attention to how difference and cultural exchanges are articulated in travel and displacement. For him, "[c]ultural action, the making and remaking of identities, takes place in the contact zones, along the policed and transgressive intercultural frontiers of nations, peoples, locales. Stasis and purity are asserted – creatively and violently –

against historical forces of movement and contamination" (*Routes* 7). Thus, travel and movement are reinserted into a critical debate about cultural productions.

This reinsertion is certainly meaningful, especially if one approaches identity as a process which is subject to change and historicization, or as a "process of becoming, rather than being" (Hall "Who Needs" 4).[4] However, when one thinks about the connection between travel and encountering another culture and its identity(ies), questions regarding how to represent the "cultural other(s)" may be raised. Many of these questions focus on the possibilities or impossibilities of representation, based not only on the travellers' understanding of the other, but also on the codes used to translate the other's culture into something "understandable" (how to translate difference into sameness, in a way). These questions become even more complicated when one thinks, for example, about the particular kind of travel represented by Page's movement in her trip to Brazil: the travel inside the Americas themselves, a movement between North and South.

Travel North and South: a "Re-discovery" of New World Meanings

Considering Stuart Hall's argument that "[r]epresentation through language is [. . .] central to the process by which meaning is produced" (Introduction 1) and that "[m]eaning is constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part" (Introduction 3), it is significant to think that contemporary writers such as Elizabeth Bishop, P. K. Page, and Jan Conn, even if in different time ranges (middle and late twentieth century and early twentieth-first century), travel to South America, particularly to Brazil, and produce cultural representations of this new other. Through their writing, these three North American poets try to make sense of their experiences crossing frontiers inside the "New World," a world which has already been defined by so many different commentators, and which carries with it some meanings that, even been constantly challenged since colonization, still permeate what could be called "post-colonial encounters."

---

[4] In "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?," Stuart Hall discusses how identities become processes of positioning within discursive practices.

One of the meanings that underlie these poets' writing on travel is the notion of the encounter between "civilization" and "barbarism." Through these writers' movement from what is usually considered a "civilized/modernized" North to a "tropical/underdeveloped" South, the old conflict between "civilization" and "barbarism" is once more re-enacted. On the other side of the Equator, where everything seems completely different, and, as Bishop notices, even the sun is "the other way around" (*CP* 93), notions of a place still on the verge of "civilization" are raised and questioned by these writers, who are able to re-think their own ways of approaching cultural formations. When Brazil is, in Page's "Forestaste," for example, naturally (metonymically) reduced to nuts, coffee, and tropics, or when Page describes her conversation with the diplomat's wife, who claims she would be afraid if she were going to Brazil, there is a reinsertion of the idea that leaving North America towards the South equals leaving the skyscrapered coast, the civilized coast and its certainties, towards the unknown, the wild, and why not to say, the *uncanny*.

The presence of this conflict between "barbarism" and "civilization" in the literature produced in the Americas is not new, and goes back to colonial narratives, taking different forms depending on the time period and the forces involved in it. Renata Wasserman, in *Exotic Nations: Literature and Cultural Identity in the United States and*

Brazil, 1830 – 1930, argues that New World societies, since their independence, struggle to affirm their identities against European notions of civilization and culture. These societies, after being defined through the mediating agency of the "exotic" which, according to Wasserman, "is a mode in which strangeness is translated for the West" (13), and which "mediates between the defining self and a more radical otherness" (14), have to "re-define" themselves taking into consideration the colonial point of view and its exotic representations of the American other.

For Wasserman, the reformulation of national identity after independence, instead of trying to erase or deny natural or exotic characteristics, searches for a balance between the American difference and its affiliations to an urbanized, "civilized," European culture. According to her, "[o]n one hand, it is necessary to ascribe positive value to the non-European component, because it handily signifies a positive difference between former colony and former metropolis; on the other hand, choosing the non-European component as an identifying trait risks a judgment of barbarism by a metropolis arrogating to itself the title of civilized" (11). It is "inside" the struggle to find a balance between these two forces (civilization and barbarism) that Wassermann sees the literature of New World societies at the time of their independence.

In a similar line of thought, but considering the literature produced in the Americas from different perspectives and time ranges, Earl Fitz points out that, since the colonial period, the "deep-seated sense of conflict between civilization and the 'barbarous' wilderness has developed into a basic feature of New World literature, manifesting itself at different times and in different forms" (211). Fitz sees this conflict as an expression of the "civilizing" forces of the east (represented by urban centres) pushing west in the American continent, trying to "civilize" it while erasing cultural practices and locations considered "barbarous" or "wild" (212). Also, for the critic, another dimension of such conflict, which is "[c]losely related to the quest for identity," is its focus on the nature of a "hybrid" culture, "neither totally 'cultured' nor totally 'barbaric,'" and which "struggles to define itself" (212). Despite a certain degree of "generalization" in his approach to this conflict in the literature of the Americas, Fitz is precise in locating a common anxiety in literary concerns North and South the Equator.

Both Wasserman and Fitz re-connect the struggle between "civilization" and "barbarism" to American societies' quest for identity, and to the affirmation of their competing (independent) positions in a modern world. However, while both authors approach this conflict from an East/West perspective (where East represents European or more urbanized centres – the "civilized" – and West is the Americas and their interior – the more "savage" or wild world), this present work approaches the conflict from a North/South perspective, with North American writers travelling South and redefining self and other. In this encounter, the focus is not only on how North and South American societies perceive their relationships with the European/civilized East, but also on how they perceive their relationships with each other in a new movement of "re-discovery."

Indeed, since both North and South still have to deal with colonial legacies that keep being reviewed and reconstructed, the expectations involved in such an American encounter are also embedded in these same legacies. According to Neil Larsen, for example, "[m]uch of what the North reads or writes of the South – or, as frequently happens, what it does *not* read or write – continues to derive its authority from this same wellspring of colonial 'common sense'" (2). Larsen's argument brings an important perspective for this work: in the movement between North and South Americas, there is an expectation that it is the "civilized" North who travels and re-discovers the "savage/wild" South, being still authorized by colonial ideas of exploration and representation. Thus, the direction of the movement between these two destinations (*from* North *to* South) is a relevant aspect of the encounters that will be discussed in this work, and it is certainly connected to how Bishop, Page, and Conn represent and challenge their own positions as writers of the other. Such questions are also embedded in a discussion of questions of power in travel.

Questions regarding travel subjects, their destinations, or the reasons involved in their journeys have also become important topics in the debate of travel writing. Taking into consideration that different travel experiences should be placed in particular material conditions that are usually not the same for every traveller, writers such as Caren Kaplan caution the critic or the theorist who tends to look at travel and displacement only in a celebratory way. In *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, Kaplan raises the fact that the positive tone of viewing travel as enabling a series of encounters which helps the construction of one's identity may hide the material conditions for travel which, for the author, are essential, since not everybody can choose to travel or to stay at home. For the critic,

> [j]ust as the solid association between national spaces and identities becomes loosened and, in some cases, dissolves, the attribution of identity for subjects in modernity is uneven, increasingly differentiated, and, quite often, contradictory. To make this assertion, however, is not to claim a celebratory hybridity in a world

> culture of heterogeneity. To put it bluntly, few of us can live without a passport or an identity card of some sort. (9)

One of Kaplan's main arguments is that, despite our contemporary awareness of the fact that movement and dislocation challenge notions of identity as a "fixed" entity inside national borders, the material conditions that lead to the displacement or stasis of these same identities should be taken into consideration. For her, more than only celebrating movement and destabilization as leading forces in aesthetical cultural productions, one should reinsert the political and social aspects in the discourses of travel, as a way to "demystify their erasures of history as well as place" (4). In order to do this, Kaplan uses the term "displacement" to "read against the grain of travel, that is, to question the modernisms of representations of movement, location, and homelessness in contemporary critical practices" (4). It seems that Kaplan is interested in demystifying/deconstructing the myth of the "universal experience in exile," historicizing notions of home and away in order to account for the many forms of contemporary displacement. Analyzing the continuities and discontinuities of the production of difference between modernity and postmodernity, Kaplan also argues that travel still constitutes one of the "generators" of difference, which becomes an important aspect of travel especially when one realizes the many types of displacements involved in the acts of moving. Although she does not attempt to create "binary" differentiations between travellers who travel for "pleasure" or for "option," and the ones who travel for necessity, Kaplan seems well aware of the fact that there are huge differences between travel experiences, and that these differences should be accounted for.

In a re-reading of Kaplan's ideas, Sandra Almeida argues that Kaplan "sees the traveler as an agent and trope of modernity, literally and figuratively traversing boundaries but also participating in creating these same boundaries" ("Expanding" 48). According to Almeida, Kaplan also points out that the trope of "travel in the twentieth century cannot be disconnected from the historical legacy of the development of capitalism and the expansion of imperialism" ("Expanding" 48). In Almeida's view, this focus on expansionism leads Kaplan to see some travel experiences as neo-colonial forces, re-defining centre and periphery, and reinforcing difference as a way towards economical and social control of "marginal" societies. However, even taking into consideration Kaplan's argument that the periphery (or the Third World) has been continuously objectified and described in stereotypical terms, Almeida tries to rescue the trope of travel as a potential destabilizing practice towards resistance. Following what she calls "[James] Clifford's notion of travel as translation," Almeida focuses on the potential for questioning, creation and re-creation involved in the act of travelling ("Expanding" 52). For her, this potential is particularly relevant when one notices the "obsession" with travel in the Americas may be related to a questioning of boundaries and identity myths which are still in dialogue with a colonial past.

In "Post-colonialism: Cultures in Dialogue," Sérgio Bellei comments on Almeida's ideas about travel, and argues she is very precise in pointing out an American "obsession" with it.[5] However, from his point of view, Almeida does not deeply explore the reasons for this cultural practice, which, for Bellei (like Kaplan), should be historicized. According to Bellei, one could locate this obsession inside a possible desire for "a world in which frontiers exist to be abolished or destabilized, and vulnerable to transgression" (115), a desire caused exactly by the lack of such a vulnerable world. In Bellei's view, "this lack that motivates the desire for travelling is the cause of the alienation feeling that reaches those cultural others who are confined to the other side of the frontier" (115). For the periphery, which occupies a space out of the frontier, there is a need for travelling, a need that is ultimately connected to asymmetries of power driving "peripheral" travellers towards the centres of social and economical domination.

---

[5] The use of American in this context refers to the whole American continent and not only to the United States. Sérgio Bellei's text was originally published in Portuguese. The quotation of the title was my own translation from "Pós-Colonialismo: Culturas em Diálogo." The following quotations from his article are all my translations.

Bellei also discusses these asymmetrical encounters of power in relation to the kinds of exchanges present in travel encounters. For him, despite an apparent critical look of some commentators in relation to cultural exchanges, there seems to be a "forgetting" of the fact, already discussed by Mary Louise Pratt in her definition of contact zones, that such encounters are never completely balanced.[6] In his re-reading of Pratt, he demonstrates that, although the contact zone is a privileged place for transculturation, it is also a place of inequalities and asymmetrical power, where there is no equilibrium between what is given or received in cultural encounters (112). For Bellei, such feature of cultural exchanges prevents the critic to look at the contact zone only from a celebratory perspective or as a "utopian" space.

Although this present work definitely goes along Kaplan's and Bellei's arguments on the importance of the material conditions of travel and of the "unbalanced" character of the exchange in cultural encounters, it does not equate traveller with colonizer, or displacement with periphery. It seems to me that Kaplan prefers to see the trope of travel as linked to a modern and universalistic attempt to make exile a requirement for knowledge or critical insight, while displacement would be a more post-modern trope, representing the many different kinds of movement and their historical conditions (119). However, I would still follow Clifford's or Almeida's point that travel is a relevant term particularly for what Clifford calls its "historical taintedness, its associations with gendered, racial bodies, class privilege, specific means of conveyance, beaten path, agents, frontiers, documents, and the like" (*Routes* 30). For Clifford (and also for this present work), travel is not approached as an "innocent" trope, and it is exactly its *taintedness* that leads the critic or the theorist to think about this trope in terms of translation and cultural comparison. Travel is not seen as a mere space for the celebration of destabilized identities, frontiers, or boundaries, but as a space for the consideration of questions about "re-presentations" and "re-constructions" of historical movements and encounters.

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[6] In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary Louise Pratt defines "contact zones" as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (4); or also as "the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (6).

In *Mastery's End: Travel and Postwar American Poetry*, Jeffrey Gray also recuperates Clifford's emphasis on a view of travel as enabling critical exchanges. According to Gray, critics such as Caren Kaplan, who see travel "as counter to a politics of engagement" (7), do not necessarily account for how some contemporary writers on travel do approach it as historically marked. In his re-reading of Kaplan's assessment of Bishop's poem "Questions of Travel" (which also titles Kaplan's book), Gray argues that, even if Kaplan sees Bishop's poem as celebrating the "rootless traveler," the poet herself marked her position as historically situated by, for example, "offer[ing] critiques of, and alternatives to, the Cold War ethoes of the time" or by "explor[ing] and problematiz[ing] the touristic persona" (8). In this context, a critical approach on contemporary writers' uses of travel can indeed offer an engaged reading of the different kinds of exchanges between traveller and travelled space.

Moreover, while for Bellei the emphasis on hybridity in travel may actually diffuse the forces for resistance in unbalanced exchanges, one may ask if an equation of displacement or migration with periphery would not do the same, since embedded in a binary trope that does not allow much space for discussion and resistance. Bellei's idea that the periphery travels to the centre in order to be heard seems to lead to an argumentation that travellers from marginal countries travel for necessity while the ones from central powers travel for pleasure. Such an argument could also be used as a way to increase difference and subordination of peripheral subjects. In the introduction to *Travel Writing and Empire*, Steve Clark argues that the essays collected in this volume "seek to resist the reduction of cross-cultural encounter to simple relations of domination and subordination" (3). Even if his argumentation is referring strictly to new approaches to colonial travel writing, his definition of the book's main reading scope raises a relevant question. Quoting Paul Gilroy, Clark argues that it can be politically dangerous to affirm that only the white traveller can travel for pleasure or for "unforced" reasons, while the periphery is "coerced" or migrates (4). The re-assessment of travel texts should include, for this critic, a reading of all its complexities and ambivalences.

It is in this same line of thought that I would like to approach the North/South encounters present in this work. Although I will be dealing with what could be considered a "centre to periphery" travel encounter, in which images of "civilization" and "barbarism" are once more re-enacted, I do see this encounter as more than an imposition of a Northern-civilized-colonizing gaze over an objectified-savage-subordinated South. In this encounter, the position of the traveller as the "privileged" exile, who is able to see and analyze her/his surroundings without being touched by them, is demystified. Certainly, the writing of the three main poets who will be the focus of this work demonstrate a self-awareness of their positions as white, female, North American, Anglo-Saxon travellers, moving South and trying to write about a different tradition. Consequently, a great part of their writings is, to some extent, "authorized" by their cultural background. However, what could be approached as their "privileged" looks at the other is also destabilized by their experience of difference. More than only an imposition of impressions on the other, the images created by Bishop, Page, and Conn carry with them a questioning about the kinds of power involved in the relations between observer and observed. In this context, the intricacies of race, gender, class, political and cultural backgrounds inevitably mark their writing on travel.

Travel and Representation: Recognition and Otherness

Even though the focus of this work is on contemporary encounters between North and South Americas, these journeys are not free from its historical legacies. Following Clifford's recognition that "[e]veryone is on the move and has been for centuries" (*Routes* 2), this study does not approach travelling in the Americas as an isolated or only contemporary activity. The representations and insights brought by contemporary travel narratives are in dialogue with a not-so-distant past which is also replete with voyages, exploration and colonization. In the introduction to *Traveller's Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, George Robertson and his co-editors state that many of the narratives in the book "are rooted in the past: they are embedded in historical tales of exploration, empire or nation. The nomadic narratives of the present flow from the expansionist mythologies of yesterday" (4). It is exactly through such light that this work approaches the contemporary encounters in the Americas. Since both colonial and post-colonial encounters are marked by the contact with otherness, a reading of some colonial moments of ambivalence and negotiations of meaning in the representation of difference in travel seems particularly relevant.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with the arrival of the first European colonizers in the Americas, Europe was introduced to the idea of a New World on the other side of the Atlantic, a world which was still not part of the European imagery about foreign lands and cultures. Attempts to understand this new other, which was so distant from the Old World not only in geographical terms but also in relation to social and cultural aspects, have accompanied discussions about colonial "discoveries" since the sixteenth century. Indeed, the history of the colonization of America has been told again and again, as if to show that the meanings of the first encounters between colonizers and colonized are not "fixed" but subjected to interpretations that imaginatively "re-construct" the New World. This constant reinterpretation of meanings may be seen as a result of what Stephen Greenblatt calls "the astonishing singularity of the contact" initiated by Columbus in 1492, since "[v]irtually all prior recorded encounters between Europeans and other cultures took place across boundaries that were to some degree, however small, porous; this means that all prior encounters had been to some degree, however small, anticipated" (54). For Greenblatt, the arrival of Columbus in the Caribbean was "drastically different" from other previous colonial encounters because the European colonizers were completely ignorant of the new land and its inhabitants (55). This unprecedented situation led the Europeans to look at the new other through their traditional frames of interpretation that, according to Greenblatt, "impeded a clear grasp of the radical otherness of the American lands and peoples" (54). This awareness of an almost inevitable misrepresentation of the other during the first contacts between New and Old Worlds is at the centre of contemporary re-constructions of the New World and is a leading force in attempts to rewrite the history of the "discoveries."

Columbus's descriptions of the Caribbean played (and still play) a very important role in the understanding of how New World representations were constructed and understood in the Old World.[7] However, the Caribbean was not the only place explored by European navigators in the sixteenth-century. Many other places in the Americas were being explored in this period as well, including Brazil, which can be placed "at the heart" of European imagination and representation of the New World. While discussing the importance of travel writing in the sixteenth-century, Mary B. Campbell enumerates some of the most significant texts presenting ethnographical material about the New World in this period. From the six books cited by her, four are about Brazil or represent it in their narratives. These books include Hans von Staden's *Warhafftige Historia und beschriebubg einer landtschafft der Wilden* (1557), André Thevet's *Singularités de la France Antartique* (1557) and *Cosmographie universelle* (1575), and Jean de Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre dy Brezil* (1578) (*Wonder and Science* 27-28).[8]

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[7] On representation in relation to the New World and on the typology between Old and New Worlds, see Jonathan Hart, *Representing the New World: English and French Uses of the Example of Spain* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 11-12, 116.

[8] Although all these books have been translated into English, I have decided to cite their titles in the original language, since this is the way Campbell presents them in her book. The other books cited by her are Fernandez de Oviedo's *Historia general de las Indias* (1535) and Girolamo Benzoni's *Historia del mondo nuevo* (1565).

These texts are examples of the significant presence of Brazil in the discussions of the New World and of how this presence greatly influenced the European understanding of colonial "discoveries." In this context, a brief discussion on how Brazil was represented in some sixteenth-century travel accounts can illuminate some aspects of the European reasoning towards the "discovery" of a New World.

Cultural representations of the other (based more on particular experiences of the New World than on "transparent" descriptions of its "reality") created the first images of Brazil in the sixteenth-century. Chronicles and navigation accounts of the time represented this New World not only in light of the writers' particular views and interests in the land and its people but also as a way of trying to define their existence. The understanding of this existence was always a controversial aspect of the representation of the New World since it was not connected to any kind of history the Europeans could make sense of. Usually defined in opposition to a historical and traditional Old World, the New World was invariably seen as "a virgin land" where its inhabitants' past did not really matter as it was not connected to a European history of civilization. This view of *New* versus *Old* Worlds led (and still leads) to a constant subordination of the first to the history and interests of the other.

The history of Brazil, for example, is subordinated to the European history of navigation and travel expeditions, and is generally said to have "started" when the Portuguese explorer Pedro Álvares Cabral arrived on the country's coast (in a place today known as Porto Seguro), on April 22, 1500. From the beginning, Brazil's official history already reflects a conflicted relationship between different European interests in the "truth" of the new land. Although Cabral is still declared the navigator responsible for the "discovery" of Brazil, he was at least the fourth explorer to arrive in the new land, being preceded by Alonzo de Ojeda, Vincent Pinzon, and Diego Lope (Burton lxxix). Also, the reasons for Cabral's arrival in Brazil have been very much debated over the centuries. While some historians believe that Cabral's "discovery" was accidental, due to a sea storm that led him to deviate from his main destiny (Goa), it has also been argued that he intentionally changed the course of his journey in order to explore new routes he had already been acquainted with (Smith 1-2). However, whatever the reasons for Cabral's arrival in Brazil, it was because of his expedition that Brazil became another port for European exploration of the New World.

One of the first accounts on Brazil was written by Pero Vaz de Caminha, who was a chronicler travelling with Cabral. Caminha wrote a letter (dated May 1, 1500) to King Manuel I in which he described their discovery and the week the Portuguese spent in Brazil. Like Columbus's accounts, depicted by Campbell as a "mixture of official report and propaganda" (*Witnesses* 165), Caminha's letter is also rich in details that were permeated by his "propagandistic" view of the New World and its people: fertile land, great weather, and inhabitants showing such simplicity of mind that would not be difficult to dominate them. This picture of Brazil could be considered a result of Caminha's attempts to convince the King of Portugal of the great benefits this land could bring to their nation, especially because the expedition led by Cabral was supposed to go to India and not to the New World. One of the factors that emphasizes this "propagandistic" aspect of Caminha's letter is his technique of presenting his own interpretations of the new land through the telling of stories about the Portuguese experience there instead of just enumerating its qualities. Although it is difficult to know if Caminha had already been acquainted with Columbus's accounts of the New World, his letter, like Columbus's, "gives" meaning to the new reality of the "discovered" land through his *narration* of it. For Campbell, one of the features that differentiates Columbus's writing from the previous travel writing already known in Europe at his time is his rhetorical strategy of creating a narrative that includes his individual experience and sensibility and is more than a pure description of facts (*Witnesses* 168). In the same way, Caminha's letter narrates a story of the New World, in which the "propagandistic" tone constructs a balance between what is *expected* to be seen and what is *really* seen in the new land.

The Brazilian land is as "paradisiacal" to Caminha as the Caribbean is to Columbus. Beauty, good weather, and abundance of limpid waters and trees that never lose their leaves and provide a great amount of fruit are the main characteristics of the new land just discovered by Cabral. These images of fertility are created in the letter through the stories Caminha tells about Portuguese men going inside the forests and coming back with huge colourful birds and other "exotic" animals, or through the description of the delicious fruits of the palm trees and the giant shrimps and other fish they are able to appreciate in their visits to the land. The inhabitants of the new land are also seen through Caminha's negotiations between old and new meanings. Although the native inhabitants are described as "sparrows afraid of being lured," Caminha argues that, because of their natural simplicity, they were not difficult to be subdued and could be taught whatever the Europeans wanted them to learn (especially Christianity, one of the main excuses for European expeditions at the time).[9] This way, Caminha's letter emphasizes the natives' innocence and potential for conversion. According to Caminha's description, "[t]hey seem to be such innocent people that, if we could understand their speech and they ours, they would immediately become Christians, seeing that, by all appearances, they do not understand about any faith. [. . .] Any stamp we wish may be easily printed on them, for the Lord has given them good bodies and good faces, like good men" ("Letter" 25). Caminha's emphasis on the natives' wildness and simplicity permeates his whole letter, and the "domestication" of this simplicity is as important to him as it is to Columbus. According to Caminha, the Portuguese "dare not severely talk to [the natives] in order to avoid that they become more afraid; and everything is done as [the natives] want, with the purpose of better taming them."[10] For Caminha, this treatment is so successful that, at the end of the week, he tells his reader that, "[the natives] were already making so much conversation with us that they almost disturbed us in what we had to do."[11] The importance of this "taming" practice goes beyond Christian conversion, though. In some passages of his letter, Caminha emphasizes what he sees as the natives' naiveté in exchanging their hard work (as filling barrels of water, for example) for anything the Portuguese want to offer them (like hats, shirts, and some tools).

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[9] The expression "sparrows afraid of being lured" is my translation to "eles [. . .] se esquivavam, como pardais, do cevadoiro" (*Carta* 222). I translated *pardais* for "sparrows" and, since Jaime Cortesão (the

However, as fertility and native "innocence" are not the only important things for the Portuguese Crown, gold and silver (not found in their visits to the land) are also possibilities in Caminha's letter, and he describes this possibility in his account of the

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editor of this particular edition of Caminha's letter) refers to *cevadoiro* as the bait used to attract and hunt birds (Notas 312), I translated *se esquivavam [. . .] do cevadoiro* for "afraid of being lured." For excerpts of the letter that I found translated into English, I quote the translated version. They are from Caminha's letter in E. Bradford Burns, Ed., *A Documentary History of Brazil*.

[10] This is my translation to "não lhes ousa falar de rijo para não se esquivarem mais; e tudo se passa como eles querem, para os bem amansar" (*Carta* 222).

[11] This is my translation to: "Era já a conversação deles conosco tanta que quase nos estorvavam no que havíamos de fazer" (*Carta* 228).

visit of two native inhabitants to the Portuguese ships. According to him, the natives boarded the ship when the Portuguese admiral was very well dressed and wearing a big golden collar. When the natives saw him, "one of them gazed at the admiral's collar and began to point towards the land and then at the collar as if he wished to tell us that there was gold in the country. And he also looked at a silver candlestick, as if there was silver there, too" ("Letter" 22-23). If the native man really made these gestures when he saw the admiral, or if the Portuguese "chose to understand" him in that way, it is hard to know.[12] However, this passage illuminates Caminha's negotiation of meanings in relation to what the Portuguese were looking for in their "discoveries."

Caminha's was not the only account of Brazil in Europe in the sixteenth-century. Jean de Léry's *History of a Voyages to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America*, published in 1578 (almost thirty years after Léry's expedition to Brazil), was one of the most detailed documents about the South American country at the time. Although Léry's representation of the new land is anchored on his own experience of it, he also seems aware of the ambivalences of his own representation of the Brazilian other. In his preface, Léry points out the inevitable "marvellous" nature of the things he is going to describe, since "everything to be seen [in this land of America] – the way of life of its inhabitants, the form of the animals, what the earth produces – is so unlike what we have in Europe, Asia, and Africa that it may very well be called a 'New World' with respect to us" (lx-lxi). Léry tries to reconcile this "fabulous" nature of his descriptions reminding the reader he uses expressions such as, "I saw, "I found," "this happened to me," in order to transform unbelievable things into believable stories (lxi). However, even supported by his experience, the difficulties of representing this "un-represented" other is a constant concern in the narrative, and it is directly addressed in one of his descriptions of the natives, when he comments: "I took such care in observing all of them, great and small, that even now it seems to me that I have them before my eyes, and I will forever have the idea and image of them in my mind. But their gestures and expressions are so completely different from ours, that it is difficult, I confess, to represent them well by writing or by pictures" (67). The act of transparently representing the other is questioned by Léry, and in his narrative, even *experience* does not guarantee a complete understanding of the "unknown" New World. Léry's uncertainty permeates his mediation or translation of the American other, and the interplay between memory and careful observation helps him to re-define his experience of the new land.

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[12] The expression "choose to understand" is actually used by Caminha when, describing the same episode of the native inhabitants visiting the Portuguese boat, he argues that "[i]f [. . .] he was trying to tell us that he would take the beads and the collar as well, we did not choose to understand him, because we were not going to give it to him" ("Letter" 23).

Such negotiations of meaning are present in many other accounts of American lands and its people throughout the colonial period. For Tzvetan Todorov, in *The Conquest of America: the Question of the Other*, this is due to the fact that the "discovery" of the New World enabled the discovery of alterity itself, since neither the Europeans nor the native inhabitants of America had any previous knowledge of their other at the moment of discovery. Paradoxically, this encounter with difference leads to the rejection of difference as well. According to Todorov, the "entire history of the discovery is marked by this ambiguity: human alterity is at once revealed and rejected" (50). Not able to deal with such an unexpected and different other, both Europeans and the American inhabitants would "misread" their other, leading to assimilation or subjugation of the ones considered by Todorov less capable of communication and adaptation. Even if suggestive, Todorov's interpretations of the "discovery" of otherness have been much debated and criticized. For Renata Wasserman, for example, Todorov points out the misreading of the other as an impediment for the finding of the "truth" about alterity without realizing that this "truth" cannot be reached. According to Wasserman, "New World otherness is not fixed [. . .] but looks different to different viewers and to different periods of time" (39). Since different waves of European explorers would have diverse purposes behind their travels to the New World, their descriptions of the new land were not only permeated by questions of comprehension and understanding, but also by their own political and ideological reasons. Wasserman also argues that Todorov's approach to the colonial misunderstanding of otherness does not account for the European's actual decimation of millions of native inhabitants of the New World (40).

Like Todorov, Greenblatt also views the encounter between New and Old Worlds as a unique moment in the history of colonization and travel. Yet, unlike Todorov, he does not approach the presence or absence of writing in European or American cultures as the "crucial cultural difference" between them (11). Such difference, in Todorov's perspective, "determined the outcome" of the encounter between Cortés and Montezuma (Greenblatt 11). From Greenblatt's point of view, there is "no convincing evidence that writing functioned in the early encounter of European and New World peoples as a superior tool for the accurate perception or effective manipulation of the other" (11-12). For this critic, it is in the colonizers' attempts at "translation" and "mediation" (through figures such as Doña Marina, for example), and also through their attempts at imagining and recreating the other according to their own frames of understanding that the New

World could be defined according to "Old interests."[13] It is exactly this emphasis on the negotiations of meaning or on the instabilities or uncertainties raised from the encounter with difference that seems to offer important moments for a re-reading of the representation of otherness in travel. By recognizing the points of mediation and translation in colonial narratives of encounter, one may also recognize new ways of re-interpreting the "master" narratives of the past, destabilizing and deconstructing their meanings.

In "Travel and Unsettlement: Freud on Vacation," Brian Musgrove approaches "the travel text as a site of distress and unravelling" (31), and in looking at such "distressing" moments of the text, he suggests that, "[l]andscape and traveller are sites of indeterminacy, so that travel is not the simple inscription of an established meaning over a neutralized, identityless other. The travelling subject, wavering between two worlds, is by no means the self-assured colonist; rather, that subject is poised to split and unravel" (39). In Musgrove's re-reading of Greenblatt's emphasis on "witnessing" as the primal act of imagining and completely "ordering" the new travelled space, the traveller is actually always confronted with a lack of fulfillment of complete significance. Musgrove presents, for example, a discussion of Meaghan Morris's critique of the Australian travel writer Ernestine Hill as a way to further expand his point on the ambivalences of travel writing. For Musgrove, "Morris's reading sees the traveller wavering between two worlds: one of the concrete, of the objective, of desire satisfied through the written record of possession; the other is a world of frustration and derealisation, populated by mirages, spectres, ghosts, where the fantasies of possessing and occupying the other – of knowing, with any certainty – simply vanish" (40). Although Musgrove is talking specifically about colonial and imperialist travel narratives, his debate on the ambivalence and unsettling experience of travel also echoes some of the concerns present in contemporary writings on the other. Like colonial representations of otherness, contemporary "re-discoveries" of the Americas, and their approximation of different historical legacies, may enable some unexpected recognitions.

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[13] According to Greenblatt, Doña Marina, "the daughter of Aztec lords," was of vital importance for the communication between the Spanish and the Aztec during Cortés's colonial enterprises (142). As Greenblatt points out, "Doña Marina spoke both the Aztec and Mayan tongues fluently and quickly learned Spanish" (142); she "is the principal agent of the circulation of cultural representations elsewhere blocked in the Spanish perception of their experiences" (142).

One of the main contributions of a re-reading of narratives that create an unexpected intersection between apparently distant cultures is that, in this intersection, there is a shock between tradition and experience. This shock (despite the very different proportions) could be seen as a re-enactment of the shock faced by European explorers in their encounters with the New World. In the introduction to *New Worlds, Ancient Texts*, Anthony Grafton and his co-editors raise the story of José de Acosta's laughter after sailing through the Torrid Zone and recognizing that Aristotle was wrong. For these writers, the European explorers, realizing the ancient books that enabled their education were fallible, were confronted with the fact that the actual experience of the New World represented a break in tradition. They also suggest that the "encounter with naked inhabitants of a new world, in short, enabled intellectuals to make naked experience take the place of written authority" (5). Thus, the encounter between the educated European with the New World and its inhabitants brought with it a new way of learning and experiencing reality.

In moments of recognition like this, the textual or imaginary existence of the other is challenged by the actuality of the travel experience, leading to a collision between past knowledge and the baffling or "alien" other. Paradoxically, this challenge created by the actuality of the other, enables redefinitions of concepts such as home and self. It is in the light of cultural recognition as the one represented by Acosta's laugh that this work approaches contemporary encounters with a cultural other. In Bishop's, Page's, and Conn's works, there is also a shock between "un-expected" realities, in which previous modes of understanding may not apply to the actuality of the other. In their travels South, these poets' experiences destabilize both their writing and their approaches to self and world. It is through these destabilizations that I read their re-constructions of their historical positions in the Americas.

Travel and History: Reading "Behind the Scenes"

As a way to introduce these considerations, I began with P.K. Page's descriptions of her expectations before travelling to Brazil; it seems equally relevant to bring such reflections to a close with one of Elizabeth Bishop's poems, "Brazil, January 1, 1502." This poem is particularly relevant to my introduction since it presents a re-reading of questions of encountering and recognition. In it, the contemporary traveller's and the colonial explorer's gazes are juxtaposed in their admiration of the spectacle of the new territory and in their literal attempts to conquer the unknown. Such juxtaposition, established from the very first verses of the poem, opens a space for reflection on how past and present inevitably intertwine in contemporary re-discoveries of travelled spaces. Thus, the poem starts with "gazing:" "Januaries, Nature greets our eyes / exactly as she must have greeted theirs: / every square inch filling in with foliage—" (*CP* 91). Although the juxtaposition of "our" and "theirs" is not resolved until the last stanza of the poem, the eager eyes go on to describe everything they see: from the many different sizes and colours of leaves, with "occasional lighter veins and edges" (*CP* 91), to

> monster ferns
> in silver-gray relief,
> and flowers, too, like giant water lilies
> up in the air—up, rather, in the leaves—
> purple, yellow, two yellows, pink,
> rust red and greenish white;
> solid but airy; fresh as if just finished
> and taken of the frame. (*CP* 91)

In this first stanza, nature and the tropical forest, with its many shades of green and its multicoloured flowers and plants, greet the observer, not allowing much space for anything else besides a bewildering appreciation of its amazing wild character. There is also a sense of newness and beauty which reminds the observer of a "fresh painting," in which stillness reigns. In these verses, the spectacle of nature is literally framed through the objectifying gaze that does not only attempt to capture it in the stillness of representation, but also imposes its own desires for ordering and for the lush of this "exotic" otherness.

Even in the second stanza, the sense of "quietness" and of appreciation of the idyllic nature of the surrounding continues, and it opens with more demands for wondrous details:

> A blue-white sky, a simple web,
> backing for feathery detail:

brief arcs, a pale-green broken wheel,
a few palms, swarthy, squat, but delicate;
and perching there in profile, beaks agape,
the big symbolic birds keep quiet,
each showing only half his puffed and padded,
pure-colored or spotted breast. (*CP* 91)

Such stasis, with its symbolic and quiet birds (maybe attempting to avoid the observer's gaze), is actually transformed in the "stillness before the tempest." What is originally read as the welcome greeting of nature suddenly becomes the uncanny foreshadowing of a sinful encounter,

Still in the foreground there is Sin:
five sooty dragons near some massy rocks.
The rocks are worked with lichens, gray moonbursts
splattered and overlapping,
threatened from underneath by moss
in lovely hell-green flames,
attacked above
by scaling-ladder vines, oblique and neat,
"one leaf yes and one leaf no" (in Portuguese).
The lizards scarcely breathe; all eyes
are on the smaller, female one, back-to,
her wicked tail straight up and over,
red as a red-hot wire. (*CP* 91-92)

In this uncanny and wild scenery, even moss and vines are threatening forces, which only lose their powerful threat to the lizards, who "scarcely breathe" as if ready to "attack" their female partner. It is at this moment that the focus of the threat changes and it is not inside the wild nature anymore. The proximity of the threat is confirmed in the transition to the third and final stanza of the poem, when nature is actually read against its historical transformations:

> Just so the Christians, hard as nails,
> tiny as nails, and glinting,
> in creaking armor, came and found it all,
> not unfamiliar:
> no lovers' walks, no bowers,
> no cherries to be picked, no lute music,
> but corresponding, nevertheless,
> to an old dream of wealth and luxury
> already out of style when they left home—
> wealth, plus a brand-new pleasure.
> Directly after Mass, humming perhaps
> *L'Homme armé* or some such tune,
> they ripped away into the hanging fabric,
> each out to catch an Indian for himself—
> those maddening little women who kept calling,
> calling to each other (or had the birds waked up?)
> and retreating, always retreating, behind it. (*CP* 92)

Recovering the historical past of colonization and exploration, Bishop re-installs in this third stanza the shock of the encounter between the "glinting Christians" and the tropical nature and its inhabitants. The violence of such an encounter is emphasized by the higher threat the Europeans represent, which not only violates the other's identity through an "old dream of wealth and luxury" but also by the imposition of a "brand-new pleasure" related to the exploitation of the native body. Moreover, in this third stanza, the pronouns "our" and "theirs" from the first verses of the poem are defined, and as Jeffrey Gray argues, they join "two experiences of discovery: the classical moment of the conquistador and the modern arrival of the tourist" (36). In such juxtaposition Bishop explores how "old dreams" continue to be imposed on the land, since linked to a sense of control and discovery.

In Bishop's reading, contemporary North and South encounters are not ingenuous or naïve, and the poem as a unit actually challenges the very position of the observer as a writer of scenery (or as an interpreter of perceptions, as the first colonizers). Maybe, as a way to escape from *using* or *imposing* another meaning to the same natural surrounding again, Bishop reads history in nature itself, locating it or positioning it in the intersection of present and past narratives. In this context, the poem also points toward the act of framing that inevitably marks the look over the other. As Gray suggests, "to apprehend is also to obscure and to lose" (39), and Bishop's framing of the Brazilian natural surroundings reveals the poet's awareness that her own look is framed (especially if one considers the voices of the native women forever retreating to the forest).

This is the kind of destabilizations of meaning I attempt to recover in this thesis. Though Bishop, Page, and Conn, as North Americans travelling South, do not share the same history of colonization (mainly considering the different European colonial legacies in North and South Americas), their re-discoveries of Brazil are part of an archive of exploration and discovery. Following Beatriz Badikian's suggestion concerning the poet as a travel writer (73), I read these three poets as "travel explorers of sorts," moving South and re-creating new and old meanings on their travel encounters. As the observer-speaker in Bishop's poem discussed above, these writers are aware of their "outsider's look," which may try to "stabilize" and "generalize" experience. Nevertheless, their Brazilian other is indeed written, and in the bringing together of these poets' attempts to represent the connections between traveller and travelled space one may find new paths in the understanding of the trope of travel in the Americas.

Brief Notes on this Writing Journey

In the following chapters I present a reading of Elizabeth Bishop's, P.K. Page's and Jan Conn's poetical works, focusing mainly on their writing on travel, particularly on Brazil. Yet, as Brazil does not appear in isolation in their poetical writing, or, in other words, as it is not seen as a completely separate concern in these writers' poetics, my readings of their representations of Brazil follow an analysis of how travel figures as a poetical trope in their literary trajectories. The body of this thesis is, then, divided in two main parts.

In Part 1, "Travel Observations," I present three chapters that recover and re-discuss Bishop's concerns with geography, travel and representation. I start with Bishop and also devote the first part of this thesis to her work since, as already suggested by Gray, "travel is the imaginative domain she [. . .] staked out as her own" (17). Bishop's "geography lessons" invade her poetry since one of her first published poems, "The

Map," and continue to guide her poetical imagination throughout her career. Her well-known attention to observation and her preoccupations with writing as a medium of representation offer an opportunity for further reflections on the connections between self and other (observer and observed). Moreover, writing during the 1950s and the 1960s, when she was still living in Brazil, and speaking from this particular locus of enunciation, Bishop breaks new ground in her poetical considerations on travel and representation, particularly on her considerations on Brazil. In some ways, she helps create a framework for approaching Page's and Conn's attempts to negotiate their own representations of Brazil.

In Part 2, "Re-mappings of the Self," I present two chapters which recover, respectively, Page's and Conn's writings on travel and their poetical re-discoveries of the subjective traveller. With the publication of *Brazilian Journal* in 1987, Page journeys back to her stay in Brazil in the 1950s, allowing me to investigate how Brazil becomes a space of re-discovery for Page's poetical trajectory. While Page's journal offers an opportunity for reflection on the transformations of the self in the encounter with the other, Conn's writing on travel leads me to a further reading of travel and subjectivity, especially considering Conn's exploration of "inner" and "outer" landscapes. In her many travels in the Americas, notably in Brazil, Conn recovers the image of the poet as a traveller-explorer, guiding me through her considerations on the role of the traveller as a writer of the other.

Despite this tentative division, all chapters are connected through their main concern with travel and representation. I conclude with some remarks on the ambivalences of the writing on travel and how these three poets' works negotiate such ambivalences. Even if bounded in different cultural representation, to travel is to re-discover. My reading of Bishop's, Page's, and Conn's poetical writings allows me to reflect on the nature of these re-discoveries.

Part 1

Travel Observations

Chapter 1 – Mapping the Un-mappable: Elizabeth Bishop's Geography Lessons

Are they assigned, or can countries pick their colors?
--What suits the character or the native waters best.
Topography displays no favorites; North's as near as West.
More delicate than the historians' are the map-makers' colors.
Elizabeth Bishop, "The Map"

Elizabeth Bishop could be said to be a map-maker. As many of her critics have already noticed, she left traces in her poetry indicating not only possible maps to her poetics and literary interests but also to her own life. It is not unusual to look at Bishop's poetry as careful cartographic constructions which guide the reader to unexpected (or maybe even unexplored) paths; paths which provoke us to re-discover and re-present possibly familiar landscapes. As in "The Map," Bishop forces us to re-think our interpretation of conventionally accepted images of "reality;" her presentation of the map-making process extrapolates the limits of literal representation. To Bishop, representation and observation form an inseparable pair in the creation of new perspectives into the material world, yet the dialectic involved in these paired activities can be as ambivalent as her poem's questioning: are "the map-maker's colors" subjectively picked or intrinsically constitutive of the objects of representation, or are they both? Such questions are at the core of Bishop's poetics, and her approach to literary representation plays a vital role, not only to an understanding of her work as a whole but also to a particular reading of this poet's interest in the experiences of travelling and writing about unfamiliar places, peoples, and cultures.

Bishop's poetry is indeed marked by a particular questioning of the limits or meanings of art as a medium for the representation of experience. Since the beginning of her career, she has been described as a poet with an "impulse [. . .] to be precise in her search for order and beauty in the midst of chaos" (Stevenson, *Elizabeth Bishop* 113-114). In 1975, Lloyd Schwartz also pointed out that adjectives and titles such as "modest," "landscape poet," "accurate observer," or "precise," were all part of the reviews of her books or critical articles on Bishop's work (*That Sense* 1), and have, since the publication of her first poems, been part of the repertoire of criticism and reception of her writing. Bishop's poetry is usually discussed in terms of how intensely the poet's observing eye focuses on the world around her, enabling Bishop to construct a variety of images which both mirror and illuminate the particularity of experience. Even if we read her writing as more than "descriptive poetry," the poet herself would suggest that, to read her poems better, one should approach them as a "literal" or "true" experience. Commenting on her poetics, in an interview with Wesley Wehr (in 1966), Bishop states: "I always *try* to stick as much as possible to what *really* happened when I describe something in a poem" (42). It is exactly this play between "what really happened" and the "fictionality" of experience that permeates the majority of Bishop's writing. As the use of the verb "try" in the above statement suggests, representation always carries with it its own questionings on the limits of objectivity.

One of the most discussed elements in Bishop's art of representation is the influence of memory. The opening verses of her poem "Santarém," for example, present the inescapable question of the reliability of a remembered experience. Before introducing her poetical descriptions of a trip she took on the Amazon River in Brazil, the poet states: "Of course I may be remembering it all wrong / after, after—how many years?" (*CP* 185). In the representation of experience, the inevitability of subjectively remembering it also shapes and reconstructs the "chaos" of living. According to Neil Besner, this particular poem raises an "important interrogation of interpretation" (259). Such questioning is not only due to the inclusion of multiple readings the opening encourages, but also, and most importantly, due to its invitation to read it as actually "what happened," or with "what's there" in the poem itself (260). It seems that, for Besner, both the "fallibility of the first person" and the significance of the actuality of experience constitute a major pivot in the reading of Bishop's questionings of literary representation (260). It is the poet's ways of organizing and translating such experienced and remembered materials into art that leads us to a re-discovery of varied levels of "reality." In this sense, Bishop's style could undoubtedly be read as unfolding in different ways: from purely literal and descriptive to metaphorical (symbolic) and plural at its core.[1]

It is exactly this question of "literalness" and the idea of a "constant re-adjustment" of perspectives that mark much of Bishop's writing.[2] In such a context, "The Map" could be read as a signalling component in the understanding of her poetics. Unlike "Santarém," one of her latest poems, "The Map" is one of the first poems Bishop published in her career, and its significance is more accentuated by the fact it opens her first book, *North and South*, published in 1946.[3] Yet, like "Santarém," this poem seems to delineate a reflection on the art of poetic writing. For Anne Stevenson, a great part of the works published in *North and South*, including "The Map," attempts to discuss the

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[1] In "Elizabeth Bishop: North and South," Jonathan Ellis also argues that: "For Bishop, reality is always something 'adjustable.' [. . .] As she says in the poem 'Santarém', there is always a gap between the literal 'place' and the poet's 'idea of the place' later" (459).

[2] Bishop uses the phrase "constant readjustment" in "The Gentleman of Shalott" (*CP* 10). It has also been used as a critical term to her poetics; an example would be Lloyd Schwartz's use in his published thesis *"That Sense of Constant Readjustment" – Elizabeth Bishop's North and South.*

[3] "The Map" was first published in Ann Winslow, ed., *Trial Balances* (New York: Macmillan, 1935) 78-79. (Information found in Schwartz, *That Sense* 172).

"meaning of art" (*Five Looks* 45). In this particular poem, the experience of the natural world is mediated by the map itself whose representational "writing" is read and reconstituted by the poet. In the reading of this map,

> [l]and lies in water; it is shadowed green.
> Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges
> showing the line of long sea-weeded ledges
> where weeds hang to the simple blue from green. (*CP* 3)

For Lloyd Schwartz, through Bishop's use of statements and questions about the map itself, the reader is not necessarily faced with a simple description of a map, but with a "person looking at one, thinking about it" (*That Sense* 10). In Schwartz's words, "the poem is a small drama" (*That Sense* 11), since it re-enacts the acts of seeing and reflecting upon observation. Also, due to this poem's insistence on focusing on the shapes and colours of a particular view of the world, other critics, such as Anne Stevenson, read it as Bishop's attempt to show how "looking at a picture of the world can humanise and domesticate it" (*Five Looks* 44). By equating the art of map-making to the art of poetic writing, Stevenson's reading focuses particularly on the question of "domestication" involved in Bishop's representation of art as a "mind in the process of reflection." This is not an uncommon view of her art, and, as already discussed, Bishop's poetry has been approached as a way to organize the disconnected or chaotic existence of the natural world outside poetry.

Nevertheless, for some other critics, Bishop's poetics is read not so much as "domestication" or "organization" as a medium for reflection on the ambivalent nature of the poetical craft itself. Sara Meyer, for example, also discusses Bishop's "The Map," pointing out that it "does not only read a map; but also maps a reading" (235). Meyer's approach concentrates on both the poet's craft of mapping, and on the reader's ability to read it as a construction. According to Meyer, Bishop's map becomes "a drawing, shifting the gaze from the familiar sea and land to imaginative, subjective scenes, dissociated from any scientific claim" (235). In its "reading," there is no easy association between real geographical elements to its mapped representations. Thus, "The Map" leaves the reader with a certain "cartographic design" (or pattern) to approach Bishop's writing and its discussion of representational practices: even if its craft may be an attempt to "tame" experience, art can also be seen as attempting to "destabilize" this same experience, since, as Meyer argues, its "signs receive meanings which exceed the world of reference they are supposed to serve (235)." In this sense, both map and poem leave the reader with images of a natural world that cannot necessarily be taken for granted, since they are constructs of cartographical or literary perspectives.

Although one may not necessarily look at "The Map" as a poetical "manifesto," or, according to Schwartz, as "a statement of what will remain a life-long concern" (*That Sense* 9), it is significant how the questions of literalness and representation (or fact and creation) are already present since the early stages of Bishop's writing. Besides the ideas of "imagination," "domestication" or "destabilization," which indeed shape this poet's approaches to art as representation, there is another influential factor as well. In this particular poem, the relations between observer and observed are also re-discovered or re-represented through its peculiar reading of the map itself. It is important, for example, that this poem presents an inversion of the question of map as reference (particularly in terms of commonplace impulses behind the "reading" of a map). There is no particular route being discovered, or any particular constructed meanings about geo-politics.[4] Also, despite the recognition of the inevitable links between artefact and natural world in such a map, the poet's reading of the geographical elements presented (such as land, water, bays, and peninsulas) reveals more about the poet's attempt at reconstructing the life embedded in such natural world, than "framing" it in a lifeless, though referential, work of art. In the poet's reading of this map, "[t]hese peninsulas take the water between thumb and finger / like women feeling for the smoothness of yard-goods" (*CP* 3). Yet, again, such possible re-constructions of meaning do not depend on the artefact alone, but on the way it gets produced and read. In Bishop's reading, the mapped coloured images, even if attempting to hide its creator's subjectivity, are "[m]ore delicate than the historian's" (*CP* 3) since they 'subtly' reveal the subject through the creation of visible and artful links between observer and observed. Even in the conventional cartographical constructions of a map, some particularity of experience may be regained. Thus, in the interplay between "literalness" and representation, the links between subject and object of representation (or between self and other) are also re-evaluated and discussed in Bishop's art.

Besides signalling Bishop's evident interest in the intricacies of literary representation, "The Map" also seems to unfold this poet's life-long fascination with geography. Throughout her *oeuvre*, Bishop often presents us with an immense variety of different places and cultures, which create another cartographical route to the images she collected during her many travels in the world. Despite her "cosmopolitanism," and even after having lived in Brazil for almost twenty years, Bishop apparently considered herself a "complete American poet" (qtd. in Brown 19), who would try to avoid what she called the "picturesque" in her writing (qtd. in Lucie-Smith 13). This frequent dialectic between "roots" and "routes" (to use an expression already coined by James Clifford) characterizes much of what could be considered Bishop's "writing on the other." As Jonathan Ellis reminds us, more than being captivated by place itself, Bishop is interested in "the movement between places" ("Elizabeth Bishop" 467). Indeed, in Bishop's works, there seems to be a focus on the possible relations enabled by the covering of distances. In her writing, "North and South," "Brazil and Elsewhere," and other geographical locations, such as Nova Scotia, Europe or Morocco, are put together, not only as a binary logic of comparison, but also as a creative, though tentative, way of establishing a dialogue between places and cultures.

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[4] However, one could definitely argue that her choices of ethnicities and their describing adjectives (such as the "moony Eskimo" or the "Danish hare" could also be seen as playing on implied meanings).

It is in such a dialogue that the acts of mapping and un-mapping become more evident in Bishop's writing. As her poem suggests, the extrapolation of frontiers, even in an actual map, seems inevitable:

> The names of seashore towns run out to sea,
> the names of cities cross the neighboring mountains
> --the printer here experiencing the same excitement
> as when emotion too far exceeds cause. (*CP* 3)

Despite an attempted containment of the natural world and its geographical locations, the focus on the printer's inability to keep every name in its "own delimited space" could be related to Bishop's awareness of how limits and boundaries may be crossed as a way to create meaning. In the process of "organizing" experience, the opposing forces of mapping and un-mapping frontiers are constantly leading the subject to look at borders' unapparent fragility. As Sara Meyer argues, "[t]he map as a metaphor suggests how we derive meaning and identity from processes of positioning" (238). Yet, such positioning is seen inside what Meyer calls a "cartographical logic" which enables the subject to search for meanings in the relations involved in spatial organizations, and not only on an unchangeable point of identification (238-239). The focus then is on process and how identity and subjectivity may be re-discovered and re-constructed through the relations established between different geographical locales. In Bishop's writing, such processes of identification become a constant search, characterized mainly by reflections on her "questions of travel."

Despite the fact that the main focus of my reading of Bishop's work is on her travel writing, with a particular emphasis on her writing on Brazil, the questions raised in a poem such as "The Map" are intrinsically constitutive of her poetics and may be approached as starting points to a reading of Bishop's literary representational practices in general, and her travel representational practices in particular. As mentioned previously, Bishop's writing may indeed be approached as mappings and un-mappings of the art of writing and representing, and "The Map" signals important poetical interests, such as the interplay between subjectivity and literalness, and how this subjectivity gets constructed and reconstructed through the relations between people, places, and cultures. My own reading of Bishop's poetry follows Meyer's suggestion of approaching it through what she calls Bishop's "cartographical logic of writing" (241). This logic recognizes the importance of locating each text in a particular place and time, as "there is no virgin territory which can speak free of maps, and maps, too, like the subjects reading them, are culturally inscribed" (241). Yet, more than looking at mapped locations as stabilizing forces in the understanding of representational practices, Meyer also views them as Bishop's attempt to "open up" a space for the discussion of difference and possibility. It is exactly in this space that my own questions about Bishop's representational practices will take place.

As a poet who has been commonly described as "frequently taking herself to the edge of what she knew, to the horizon of the unknown" (Karpeles 9), Bishop re-creates the need for attentive observation. In her writing, the interplay between subjectivity and representation is re-inscribed through what she has called "a constant useless concentration."[5] Close observation is, for Bishop, the means for the re-discovery of relations between peoples and places, and by extension for the re-discovery of one's own positioning in identification processes. Yet, it is exactly through such observing activity that the object of observation also gets re-discovered and re-inscribed. Thus, in this chapter, I will discuss how Bishop's construction of map-making relations are inevitably also a re-construction of the connection between observer and observed. My main interest is in the idea of re-discovery, and how it is shaped by Bishop's own attempts to extrapolate the limits of "literalness," especially as a way to deal with the representation of difference and otherness. For such a discussion, I will present an analysis of her poetics of travel as a way into her writing on the Brazilian other. However, since Bishop's criticism has been also informed by an investigation of her "constant readjustment" in the many places she has lived and travelled to, the following section will give an account on Bishop's life, and how it has been constantly linked to her own poetical interests.

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[5] This phrase was taken from what has been called Bishop's Darwin letter. For this and other quotations of the letter, I use the extract published in Stevenson, *Elizabeth Bishop* 66.

"Art 'copying from life' and life itself:" Journeying through the Poet's "Inner" and "Outer" Worlds

The awful sensation passed, then it came back again. "You are you," something said. "How strange you are, inside looking out. [. . .] you are you *and you are going to be* you *forever."*
Elizabeth Bishop, "The Country Mouse"

Elizabeth Bishop, although commonly described as a modest and shy person, experienced life intensely; it is probably due to the intricacies of her many moves, travels and losses that her life has been approached by different commentators as the life of a "constant outsider." Indeed, reading about Bishop's life-story is almost experiencing the reading of a travel narrative, following the map of a life that, from a very early age, was crossing frontiers in the Americas and in Europe. In the biography *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It*, Brett C. Millier argues, for example, that despite the fact Bishop was born in 1911 in Worcester, and also died there in 1979, "[t]hese dates and places conceal her existence as a chronically displaced person, always just removed from the wholeness, meaning, comfort, and security that we all seek in our lives" (xi). Even if Millier's sentence reveals a significant characteristic of Bishop's life (her many displacements and moves), it also inserts it in a narrative tone of "quasi-personal tragedy," which has accompanied many critical readings of Bishop's art for the past twenty years.

Born in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1911, Elizabeth Bishop spent only a short time living there. After her father's death (when she was only eight months old), her mother was constantly travelling from Worcester to Boston or to Great Village (in Nova

Scotia, where Bishop's maternal grandparents lived).[6] It was in Great Village that Bishop spent her early formative years, especially after her mother was committed to a hospital because of mental illnesses. Great Village was the place that provided Bishop's fondest memories of childhood, memories which were later recovered in poems such as "Manners" or "Sestina" or stories such as "Gwendolyn" or "In the Village." Although she considered herself more Canadian than American as a child, after moving from Nova Scotia to Worcester when her father's parents decided she would have a better education living with them, she never went back to live in Canada again.[7] In her prose piece "The Country Mouse," Bishop narrates how this drastic move from Canada to the United States was supposed to save her "from a life of poverty and provincialism, bare feet, suet puddings, unsanitary school slates, perhaps even from the inverted r's of [her] mother's family" (*CPr* 17). It was also in Worcester that Bishop had her first serious asthma crisis, a health problem that accompanied her for the rest of her life and would be an excuse for many of her moves.[8] Due to her serious health condition, in 1918 Bishop's grandfather allowed her to live with her mother's married sister, Maud Shephersdon, who would take very good care of the young Bishop in her apartment in Boston. While living with her aunt, Bishop would also attend local schools, and from 1927 to 1930 she attended Walnut Hill, a girls' boarding school in Massachusetts. There, she started to publish poems and essays in the school magazine, *The Blue Pencil*.

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[6] This biographical material on Elizabeth Bishop was mostly based on the following works: Brett C. Millier's *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It*, Gary Fountain and Peter Brazeau's *Remembering Elizabeth Bishop: an Oral Biography*, and Anne Stevenson's *Elizabeth Bishop* and *Five Looks at Elizabeth Bishop*. For other readings of Bishop's writing on Nova Scotia and her life there as a child, also see Sandra Barry, *Elizabeth Bishop: An Archival Guide to her Life in Nova Scotia* (Hantsport: Lancelot Press Limited, 1996); and Jonathan Hart, *Interpreting Cultures: Literature, Religion, and the Human Sciences* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 93-95.

[7] In her story "The Country Mouse," Bishop tells of her experience of singing War songs in her American school, something that made her feel, in her words, "like a traitor. I wanted us to win the War, of course, but I didn't want to be an American" (*CPr* 26).

[8] Brett C. Millier, for example, argues that Bishop would be constantly "moving in search for air she could breathe" (75). As an adult, depression and alcoholism would be part of her poor health conditions as well.

In 1930, Bishop entered Vassar College, where she majored in English literature and started to more seriously experiment with poetical writing. She took part in many extra-curricular activities during her time there, including working for the school newspaper (where she had the opportunity to interview T.S. Eliot), co-founding the literary magazine *Con Spirito* (which was later amalgamated with the *Vassar Review*), and publishing essays and poems at school. By her junior year she was already sending poems to be published in magazines outside school (Millier 50-51). According to Millier, '[w]hen Elizabeth began to publish stories and poems in national journals [. . .] she became something of a celebrity at Vassar and began tentatively to think of herself as a writer with ambitions beyond college" (58). It is also at this time that Bishop (through the college librarian) met the poet Marianne Moore, who greatly influenced her work and became a "mentor" figure to her. As Bishop herself recorded in her "Efforts of Affection: A Memoir to Marianne Moore:" "It seems to me that Marianne talked to me steadily for the next thirty-five years, but of course that is nonsensical. [. . .] She must have been one of the world's greatest talkers: entertaining, enlightening, fascinating, and memorable; her talk, like her poetry, was quite different from anyone else's in the world" (*CPr* 124). Both a friend and a literary influence, Moore also helped Bishop with the publication of some of her poems at the beginning of her career.

After graduating from Vassar, Bishop moved to New York where she decided to establish herself as a poet. Despite struggling with anxiety over literary practices, her daily routines, and funding (she even accepted a job as a writing instructor at a correspondence school),[9] and also with poor health conditions, Bishop managed to publish the poem "The Imaginary Iceberg" in *Directions: A Quarterly Review Of Literature* (1935), and three other poems ("The Map," "Three Valentines," and "The Reprimand") in an anthology called *Trial Balances*, in 1935.[10] During 1935 and 1936, Bishop travelled to Europe, where she started the many international travels that would also mark her whole life. Having Marianne Moore in New York to help publish her poems, Bishop travelled with friends to France, England, Spain and even Morocco. Much of the writing done at this time also appears later in her first book of poetry. Upon returning to the United States, Bishop travelled to Florida, to which she became instantly attached (Millier 113). Many of her moves "north and south" on the American ground consisted of her travels between Key West, Florida (where she lived from 1938 to 1946) and New York.[11]

In 1946, Bishop's first book of poetry, *North and South*, was published and reviewed by some important literary names, such as Marianne Moore, Randall Jarrell, and Robert Lowell. In fact, before Lowell published his review on Bishop's book, they had the opportunity to meet, which was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. It is at this point in her life that Bishop was formally introduced to the literary circles of New York, and according to Millier, "[t]he fall of 1946 is the proper beginning of Elizabeth's career as Elizabeth Bishop the poet. With a book in print and well reviewed, she began to make plans for her next volume [. . .]" (187). Yet, very critical of her own work, and not publishing as much if compared to some other writers of the time, Bishop never really felt comfortable in a competitive literary environment. Even later in life, when teaching at the University of Washington or at Harvard, Bishop did not identify with academic circles and would declare she accepted the jobs more because of the money than because of teaching itself.[12]

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[9] Bishop writes about this time in her life in the story "The U.S.A School of Writing," published in *The Collected Prose*, 35-50.

[10] Reference about the publication of these poems is found in Schwartz, *That Sense* 172 and Millier 76.

[11] My discussion of these biographical elements does not necessarily account for all the details of Bishop's moves during these years. It should be taken as a 'summary' of some of her activities at the time.

After the publication of *North and South*, Bishop received awards and fellowships, such as the Guggenheim, stayed at Yaddo in 1949, and she was the Poet Laureate at the Library of Congress in Washington (1949-1950). In October 1951, after struggling again with anxiety over her work and with serious health problems, she embarked on a trip to South America, towards Tierra del Fuego and the Strait of Magellan, a journey that was supposed to eventually become a world tour. Yet, after her first stop in Brazil to visit friends, she had an allergic reaction to the cashew fruit, leading her to delay her trip. Such "delay" became an almost twenty-year stay in Brazil, more precisely in Rio de Janeiro, where she lived and shared her life with Lota, or Maria Carlota de Macedo Soares, "the daughter of a prominent and powerful Brazilian newspaperman" (Millier 243). Lota herself was already an important name in the *carioca* elite, known by politicians, architects and the vanguard artists from the time.[13] Bishop had briefly met her and Mary Morse (Lota's partner at the time) in New York in 1942, and upon her arrival in Rio de Janeiro, she was welcome to stay in Lota's apartment in Leme. Soon after her arrival there, Bishop was spending most of her time with both Lota and Mary in the city of Petrópolis, where Lota was managing the construction of her house in the mountains. Bishop was well received and warmly taken care of after her allergic reaction, and although many critics have already speculated on what actually led

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[12] In her interview to Eileen Farley, for example, Bishop says: "I don't enjoy teaching as much as writing. I teach to earn a living" (55).

[13] *Carioca* is the name given to people born in Rio de Janeiro.

Bishop to stay in Brazil with Lota, the fact is that, by the end of December, 1951, Lota asked Bishop to stay with her, and she did.[14]

Despite feeling somewhat isolated from the North American literary circles, Bishop continued working and writing while living in Brazil. Her second book of poetry, *Poems: North and South—A Cold Spring* (which received the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1956), appeared in 1955. She worked in translations as well, translating Henrique Mindlin's *Modern Architecture in Brazil* and Helena Morley's *Minha Vida de Menina*, which was published as *The Diary of Helena Morley* in 1957. Throughout the 50s she was also working on new poems and prose both on Brazil and also on her childhood in Nova Scotia. In 1961 she accepted an offer from *Time Inc.* to write the Life World Library Guide *Brazil*, which was published in 1962. In 1965 Bishop's third book of poems, *Questions of Travel*, was published. In 1966 Bishop accepted a position to succeed Theodore Roethke as a writer in residence at the University of Washington in Seattle from January to June. After Lota's death (in September, 1967),[15] Bishop returned to the United States, living in many different places such as San Francisco, Cambridge, New York, and Boston, working as a professor, lecturing, giving poetry readings, and still writing. In 1969, her first *Completed Poems* was published, and received the 1969 National Book Award. Her translation (with Emanuel Brasil) of *An Anthology of*

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[14] For a more detailed reading of Elizabeth Bishop and Lota de Macedo Soares's relationship, see also: Oliveira, Carmen L., *Flores Raras e Banalíssimas: A História de Lota de Macedo Soares e Elizabeth Bishop* Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1995). (Translated into English by Neil K. Besner as *Rare and Uncommon Flowers: The Story of Elizabeth Bishop and Lota de Macedo Soares*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002.)

[15] There has been much speculation on the relationship between Lota and Bishop and how it deteriorated after Lota's acceptance of a governmental job leading the construction of a park in Rio. They are both reported as having suffered a great deal with depression and alcoholism due to the gradual disintegration of their relationship. Lota actually dies in New York (having followed Bishop there after the poet decided to spend some time alone) from an overdose of sleeping pills. It is also said Bishop took a long time to recover from the feeling of guilt and from the problems caused by Lota's death. See Millier, Fountain and Brazeau, and Oliveira.

Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry appeared in 1972, and in 1976, her fourth book of poems, *Geography III*, was published, winning the 1977 Book Critics' Circle Award. Bishop died on October 6, 1979.[16]

Even through this very brief biographical account of Bishop's life and activities, it is not hard to notice why a discussion of her life would seem very appealing to critics of her work. Bishop struggled to overcome the traumas of a dramatic childhood and also with questions on her literary, and even sexual identity, and seemed to move in search of a place where she felt really belonging. In this context, she can be seen as the perfect subject for a reading of her work as the result of her "tragic" life. Yet, as mentioned by many critics, Bishop was a very reserved person and the contrast between her turbulent life and her own polished and somewhat "impersonal" poetical work reveals the poet's tendency not to clearly link her private to her public life as a writer. It is interesting to note, for example, that in a time when many poets would use the confessional tone in their writing as a major poetical feature, Bishop kept her poetics very much impersonal and would even say of the so-called "confessional writers" that "they seldom have anything interesting to 'confess' anyway. Mostly they write about a lot of things which I should think were best left unsaid" (qtd. in Wehr 45). It is exactly this contrast between her work and what she supposedly left "unsaid" that seems to be one of the leading features in many critical readings of Bishop's writing.

One of the first book-length critical discussions on Elizabeth Bishop's poems was published by Anne Stevenson in 1966, a study that established an enlightening relationship between Bishop's life and her work. Although later revised by other critics

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[16] After her death, her writing was also collected in: *The Complete Poems: 1927-1979; The Collected Prose; One Art – Letters; Exchanging Hats: Paintings;* and *Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-Box – Uncollected Poems, Drafts, and Fragments.*

(and even by Stevenson herself), it signalled important characteristics that would play a significant role in the understanding of Bishop's poetry since then. In the only biographical chapter, curiously entitled "The Traveler," Stevenson argues that Bishop's life "may be regarded as a supreme intellectual, spiritual, and above all visual adventure, in the course of which she has formulated a way of looking and writing which is transcultural and transtemporal" (*Elizabeth Bishop* 25). Focusing on Bishop's "cosmopolitan Americanism," Stevenson's reading of Bishop's life as an adventurous journey brings to the fore (maybe for the first time) the now familiar link between the poet's writing and her travel experiences throughout life. For Stevenson, Bishop's writing reflects the many moves she underwent since her childhood, and despite the "pathos and horror" (29) of much of the poet's life, she managed to keep a sense of impersonality in her work, which would also demonstrate Bishop's "refusal to be theoretical about life" (30). Moreover, commenting on the now famous "Darwin letter" she received from Bishop in the 1960s, Stevenson argues that, for the poet, art would reconcile both conscious and unconscious experiences of the "real world," making life "comprehensible and more meaningful than it normally seems" (66). Although Bishop's awareness that personality and subjectivity sustained her poetry, her writing would seem completely detached from it, since, for Stevenson in 1966, Bishop would use art as a way to organize and make sense of her life, and not for self-representation or as the means for a "higher truth."

Much of the criticism produced on Bishop in the decade following Stevenson's book focused on how the poet's use of descriptive images would reflect her attempt at impersonality, even if as a way into the discussion of inner (more subjective) images. An example of this would be the 1977 edition of the journal *World Literature Today*, which was a special issue on Elizabeth Bishop's works. In this issue, writers and critics celebrated Bishop's writing and the fact she was the recipient of the *Books Abroad*/Neustadt International Prize for Literature. Many of the articles or essays focused on what Marie-Claire Blais, in her "Presentation of Elizabeth Bishop to the Jury," called Bishop's "inner and outer eye" (7). According to Blais, Bishop's poetics should not be approached as personal since "[e]verything we know about her from her poetry comes through images that transform her particular suffering or loneliness or longing into archetypal states of being" (7). Thus, in contrast to many of her contemporaries, Bishop was praised for the way her imagistic constructions would lead the reader to re-discover details in the outside world, details which, for a writer such as Octavio Paz, always revealed the uncertainty of Bishop's poetics (15). For Paz, one of the merits of Bishop's impeccable detailed observation was the way she presented things as they were, but opening them to the possibility of being something else as well; her poetics, in his words, are "paradoxical" since, in her poetry, "things become other things without ceasing to be the things they are" (15). It is exactly in this space of possibility that a connection between inner and outer worlds may be possible. In his article for this special issue of the journal, Lloyd Schwartz argues that the double meaning enabled by Bishop's writing comes from the fact that her images are not only literal images but also suggestions of "the complicate elusive geography of the inner world" ("Mechanical" 41). For Schwartz, in Bishop's writing, geography would equal autobiography.[17]

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[17] In *"That Sense of Constant Readjustment" – Elizabeth Bishop's North and South*, Lloyd Schwartz states: "What Miss Bishop sees, where she is, is her self-portrait; geography is autobiography" (9).

Such connections between "inner and outer" worlds in Bishop's writing have been revisited by many other critics since the 1970s. Thomas Travisano, in his 1988 book *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Artistic Development*, which he calls "the first comprehensive study of her career" (3), discusses Bishop's work in terms of her interest in perspective and observation, more specifically in how "imagination shapes perception" (11). Travisano acknowledges the fact that Bishop was always famous for the precision of her eyes and the detail of her observations, but he actually challenges the notion she would privilege objectivity over emotion. For him, her subjectivity was mostly manifested in her explorations of unexpected discoveries or surprising elements that would become the core material to her art. Yet, although Travisano recognizes Bishop's use of subjectivity and personality in her poetry, by dividing her work in three major phases ("Prison," "Travel," and "History), he also classifies Bishop's first phase as the most introspective and subjective one, with the development of impersonality coming from her "outward" discoveries in the second and third phases.

Due to a contemporary awareness of the many different aspects that formed Bishop's life – which came up mostly after her death in 1979, particularly after the publication of her personal letters in 1994, and also with the accessibility to her private documents and personal and literary archives – there has been a renewed interest in the relations between her life and her poetry. In the past twenty years Bishop has become what writers such as Dana Gioia and Anne Stevenson have called "a cult figure," adored not only for her own poetry but also for the many different aspects of her private life (Stevenson, "The Iceberg" 53).[18] Possibly taking Schwartz's argument on the strong links between geography and autobiography in Bishop's writing too literally, critics actually delved in Bishop's writing as a way into her own life. Brett C. Millier's biography of Bishop is one of the most prominent examples of how life and art became completely interrelated in Bishop's criticism. Millier herself states that the major aims of her "critical biography" are "telling the story of a poet's life and explaining and evaluating the poems she wrote" (xi). In this book, Bishop's writing is contextualized according to the different stages of her public and private lives, reconstituting once again the myth of the "constant outsider" who would write as a way to overcome or understand experience. In a similar way, Gary Fountain and Peter Brazeau's *Remembering Elizabeth Bishop: an Oral Biography*, published in 1994, is another example of how public Bishop's life became after her death. In it, people who knew her remember and comment on her life, providing different perspectives on how to read and approach, not only her writing, but also her own life.

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[18] In "The Iceberg and the Ship," Anne Stevenson also writes: "Of late, Elizabeth Bishop has become something of a cult figure among the literati of America and England" (53). In "Elizabeth Bishop: From

The pattern of approaching her writing as somewhat autobiographical is the most common trace in recent critical work. Lorrie Goldensohn's *Elizabeth Bishop: the Biography of a Poetry* and the collection of essays *Elizabeth Bishop: the Geography of Gender*, edited by Marilyn May Lombardi, are examples. Goldensohn's book, as its own title suggests, explores how "from impersonal, spatializing allegories" Bishop "gradually and significantly enlarged her work to include the directly personal" (ix- x). Thus, in this critic's view, Bishop would indirectly, or "obliquely" (58) reflect on important moments and events of her own life, from memories of childhood and the connections between Brazil and Nova Scotia, to a very significant discussion of homosexuality. In "The

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Coterie to Canon," Dana Gioia reflects on the reasons behind a change in attitude towards Bishop's poetics, since for the critic, "[n]o American poet of the midcentury generation [. . .] now stands higher in critical esteem or general popularity" (185-186).

Body's Roses," for instance, Goldensohn writes about what she calls Bishop's "transparently deceptive style" (53), and attempts a reading of some of Bishop's poems and their implicit or understated connections with the representation of sexuality, since for her, "[s]ome of Bishop's resistance to self-display must derive from her position as woman and lesbian, or according to some reports, as bisexual" (62). According to Goldensohn, Bishop's poetry recovered some aspects of her private life, not necessarily evident in her public life as a poet. In a similar line, *Elizabeth Bishop: the Geography of Gender* also presents significant articles on Bishop's poetry, mainly on how gender and other issues such as family life, race, and displacement mould her poetics. As Lombardi argues in the book's "Prologue:" "Each essay contributes to the mapping of Bishop's sense of difference as an orphan, a woman artist, and a lesbian" (4). In this context, this collection can also be approached as stressing Bishop's autobiographical character.

Even Anne Stevenson herself, over twenty years after her first book on Bishop, published articles and another book-length essay collection revising her readings of Bishop's poetry. Yet, not completely different from her approach to Bishop's writing in 1966, Stevenson states that "[u]nhappy events in her life did affect her poetry, but chiefly as she met and overcame them through art" ("Iceberg" 53). This particular comment can be seen as the critic's reaction to the later trend in Bishop's criticism of overanalyzing and associating the poet's "personal tragedies" to her poetical writing. Despite a seemingly disapproval of such ways of reading Bishop's personal tragedies into her art, Stevenson also insists that "the creature divided" presented in most of Bishop's writing "was created in childhood," when she was first introduced to a sense of "not belonging" which accompanied her for the rest of her life (*Five Looks* 38). By repeating the pattern of reading Bishop's writing as a result of her life as a "constant outsider," Stevenson once more reinstalls the quest for the poet's "inner stories" in the "outer" images created in her work.

Despite the many important and relevant insights brought by these critical readings, it seems that many of these texts, even if unintentionally, approach Bishop's art as a bit of a paradox. They see her art as a search for a certain poetics that reflects her personal experiences, creating something that could be called an "artistic belonging," but at the same time, such poetics would disguise these same experiences, since they are never explicitly discussed in the poems. For critics such as Bonnie Costello, such an approach seems interested in finding the "ultimate truth" about Bishop's inner life, a quest which fails to recognize "how the 'I' of [Bishop's] poems might emerge as a site of cross-identifications and cultural yearnings rather than as a coherent self" ("Elizabeth Bishop's Impersonal" 336). For Costello, much of the later criticism on Bishop focuses more on life than on art, attempting to "use" (or read art) to construct an organizing principle to her subjectivity, "even where it espouses a theory of subjectivity as fluent and decentered" (336). In Costello's discussion on how Bishop's poetics gets reduced to biographical narratives in much of the late criticism produced on her work, the critic argues:

> Private experience largely shapes the range of a poet's concerns and is inevitably reflected in her representations. In disclosing biographical material, archival research has connected those givens to the made world of art. But it has exercised no restraint in doing so, and has made imagination a mere function of personal psychology, mistaking psychological and biographical origins for the meaning and

> direction of the work. [. . .] Such studies appeal on the one hand to our desire for something factual and localized, something real, in relation to the ethereal freedom and possibility of poetry. (339)

Costello sees such anxieties in constructing a coherent narrative for Bishop's life as a result of the ambivalent and paradoxical nature of Bishop's poetry itself. Yet, the critic attempts to resist such homogeneous constructions by discussing Bishop's version of impersonality, which may be read more as a way to create communal connections than as a way to disguise personal narratives and experiences behind impersonal images of the outer world. For Costello, "[i]f Bishop's poems [. . .] remind us that we cannot know the self, they also remind us that the poem is a social gesture, not just an alienated critique" (340). Also, Bishop seems to constantly remind the reader of the impossibility of arriving at a final (or conclusive) reading of a particular experience, as it is always linked to the moment of experience itself. Thus, for Costello, Bishop acknowledges the modern idea (mainly T.S. Eliot's suggestions) that "tradition is a historical residue" (342), but she would also read along Eliot's view that not only the present is altered by the past, but the past is altered by the present as well.[19] In this context, historical "order" would depend on subjective re-readings of it. According to Costello, Bishop re-constructs such insights in her poetry, but this does not mean a return to autobiographical facts. For the critic, Bishop re-reads Eliot in order to explore how voice (the lyrical voice) can be used to

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[19] In "Elizabeth Bishop's Impersonal Personal," Costello argues: "In general, critics have assumed that Bishop needed to overcome the influence of modernist "impersonality" in order to realize her full potential as a poet. But James Longenbach has challenged this 'breakthrough narrative' by pointing out that Bishop read Eliot more subtly than we do now. For all his enthusiasms for a 'complete,' 'ideal,' and 'monumental order,' Eliot recognized its historical dynamic: 'Whoever has approved this idea of order will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past'" (342).

"connect ideas (the general and the abstract realm of language) to experience – not personal experience, but particularity" (343).

It is in this line of thought that I include my own reading of Bishop's writing. Indeed, Bishop's art of "close observation" does open a space for reflections on the construction of subjectivity, and as many of her critics have already noticed, her careful and detailed descriptions reveal not only the precision of her eye in observing her own surroundings, but also the careful consideration of how such representations are powerfully constructed reflections of her self. In this sense, the idea of the "geographical mirror" (actually a title she gave to a group of unpublished poems on Nova Scotia) is, according to critics such as Richard Sanger, very much present in her work and revealing something deeper about the self (114). Even Bishop would argue that writing is a form of telling the truth about oneself. In her interview with Wesley Wehr, she demonstrates her reactions to her students' anxiety about "discovering" themselves in their poetry saying, "[t]he fact is that we always tell the truth about ourselves despite ourselves" (38). Thus, although we may not take Bishop's truth as a literal inner truth about her own self, the question of subjectivity becomes emblematic in her poetics.

Instead of only approaching Bishop's writing as a bridge between her personal experiences and her poetical concerns, my main interest is to look at how literalness and subjectivity intertwine in her representational practices as a question into perspective and possibility – how writing, as such a practice, becomes a constant dialectics between subject and object of observation, or between self and other. My reading of the relations between inner and outer worlds in Bishop's writing goes along the lines of Costello's reading of it as a quest into subjective perspective – a re-discovery of self and other in particular and marked historical encounters. It is in the encounter with the outer world that the self gets re-discovered, but not only as a way to ultimately locate self and other, but actually as a way to challenge notions of subjectivity in the constant interplay of places and cultural positions. It seems that the awareness of the ambivalent dependence between self and other (or inside and outside realms) is a trait very much discussed in Bishop's writing and it is in the particularity of the subject's experience of both inner and outer worlds that the poet presents different perspectives on their dependent relationships.

In a letter to the critic Anne Stevenson, written in the 1960s during Stevenson's composition of her critical book on Bishop's writing, Bishop touches on the question of the relation between what Stevenson calls "the role of consciousness and subconsciousness in art" (*Elizabeth Bishop* 66), which could also be read as an address to the dependence of both inner and outer worlds (or self and other) in representational practices. This letter (the "Darwin letter") was written after Bishop had already been living in Brazil for at least a decade, and after producing some of her own reflections on the nature of close observations. Since this letter still seems to raise important questions for the understanding of Bishop's art, I will once more quote the particular passage originally cited in Stevenson's book in 1966. Talking about a supposed split between rationality or irrationality, or consciousness and sub-consciousness, Bishop says:

> There is no "split." Dreams, works of art (some) glimpses of the always-more-successful surrealism of everyday life, unexpected moments of empathy (is it?), catch a peripheral vision of whatever it is one can never really see full-face but that seems enormously important. I can't believe we are wholly irrational—and I do admire Darwin—But reading Darwin one admires the beautiful solid case being

> built up out of his endless, heroic observations, almost unconscious or automatic—and then comes a sudden relaxation, a forgetful phrase, and one feels that strangeness of his undertaking, sees the lonely young man, his eyes into the unknown. What one seems to want in art, in experiencing it, is the same thing that is necessary for its creation, a self-forgetful, perfectly useless concentration. (Bishop qtd. in Stevenson *Elizabeth Bishop* 66)

In Bishop's reading of the kind of close observation performed by a naturalist such as Darwin, she perceives the "return of the subject" in unexpected moments of "heroic observations." Although the letter has been already discussed by many different commentators, and despite the fact that even Costello reads it as "Bishop's version of the impersonal" as it "refers to the pull of the physical world" (340), what interests me in this particular passage is exactly the idea of how, even in self-forgetfulness, the relations between observer and observed are re-discovered due to an inevitable awareness of perspective, or an awareness of the observer's *eyes* "into the unknown." The "endless observations" demand complete concentration, which is, paradoxically, "useless," since always permeated by the self. Yet, it is exactly this paradoxical re-discovery of self and other relations that becomes particularly significant to the reading of Bishop's reflections on 'travel,' and even more significant when one focuses on Bishop's writing on Brazil, maybe the "ultimate unknown or surreal space" for the North American poet. The "unknown" is observed and mediated by the traveller-explorer and it is exactly this ambivalent process of "mediation" that attracts Bishop's reflections upon the nature of writing or art in general. It seems that, by bringing Darwin's eyes to the fore in her questions on observation, Bishop recognizes her position in the Western discourse of exploration, but, at the same time, more than reproducing a discourse of impartial or objective observation (of ordering the chaos of experience),[20] she challenges the "naturalness" of the undertaking, bringing awareness to its "strangeness," to its constructed perspective, and to the different positions the subject takes in the encounter with the "outer world."[21]

This interplay between the particularity of experience and how much of it can be apprehended and minutely described by the subject (observer) in a way that does not enclose either the subject or the object of observation in a permanent fixed reality, but which actually points out to the "constructedness" of representational practices, permeates much of Bishop's writing in the different phases of her work. Since the very beginning of her career, she presents a concern with what is embedded in representational practices, and the above letter is just one example of how far she would go in questioning the dependence of poetical practices and different subject positions. For Bishop, it is exactly in the most "self-forgetful" moment, when the subject seems to be completely self-detached, that the awareness of perception comes back, enabling the creation of art. It is as if the self were, for Bishop, like the low tide ocean, in her poem "The Bight," which is "[a]bsorbing, rather than being absorbed, / the water in the bight doesn't wet anything" (*CP* 60). The self is also absorbing its surroundings, seemingly "un-wetting" them. What is usually hidden by the water is exposed in the poem. Yet, during the speaker's observation of such "sceneries" enabled by the low tide bight, the "click, click" of a dredge reminds the self (or the speaker) of the dripping marl – not everything is completely uncovered, and the water still wets what it touches (maybe covering more than allowing one to see). Thus, the poem ends:

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[20] When discussing the nineteenth-century "interior explorations" of natural history in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary Louise Pratt argues that "[u]nlike navigational mapping, natural history conceived of the world as a chaos out of which the scientists *produced* an order" (30).

[21] In unpublished essay notes (now collected in *Edgar Allan Poe and the Juke Box*), Bishop actually attempts to reflect on these ideas. She writes: "Writing poetry is an unnatural act. It takes great skill to make it seem natural. Most of the poet's energies are really directed towards this goal: to convince himself (perhaps, with luck, even some readers) that what he's up to and what he's saying is really inevitable, *only* natural way of behaving under the circumstances" (207). On these same notes, she also writes: "Off and on I have written out a poem called 'Grandmother's Glass Eye' which should be about the problem of writing poetry. The situation of my grandmother strikes me as rather like the situation of the poet: the difficulty of combining the real with the decidedly un-real; the natural with the unnatural; the curious effect a poem produces of being as normal as *sight* and yet as synthetic, as artificial, as a *glass eye*" (212).

> Click. Click. Goes the dredge,
> and brings up a dripping jawful of marl.
> All the untidy activity continues,
> awful but cheerful. (*CP* 60-61)

If we look at the self as the water and the dredge as writing, it is in the "untidy" activity of "bringing up" what has been absorbed by the self that we expose another level of the relationship between subjectivity and representation. Once again, the ambivalent nature of such digging is also exposed: "awful but cheerful."[22]

Although one may not necessarily look at all of Bishop's poems as meta-poetical discussions of her own representational practices, some of them indeed invite a reading of how the interplay of literalness and subjective perspective shapes her writing. Her poem "In the Waiting Room" can also be seen as a significant example (if not *the* most significant) of Bishop's articulation of the dependence of self and other in the representation of a particular experience. This poem, based on one of her childhood memories and also described in the essay "Country Mouse," tells of Bishop's experience accompanying her aunt to a dentist appointment when the author was three days short of turning seven years old.[23] Located as the first poem of her last collection, *Geography III*, right after the opening epigraph, "First Lessons in Geography," and presenting as a title and as its first line a description of location – in a waiting room "[i]n Worcester, Massachusetts" (*CP* 159) – the poem implicitly and explicitly carries with it a very heavy load of spatial location, positioning both the writer and the reader in a particular "geographical" re-discovery. The poem also tells us that

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[22] Note how this characteristic relates to what P. K. Page also calls the "tyranny of subjectivity" (which will be discussed later in this thesis).

> It was winter. It got dark
> early. The waiting room
> was full of grown-up people,
> arctics and overcoats,
> lamps and magazines. (*CP* 159)

Despite this brief description of the waiting room and the people in it, it is actually one of the magazines that becomes the focus of attention of the poem's speaker, and the reader is presented with some specific details on what is being "seen" or "discovered" in it:

> and while I waited I read
> the *National Geographic*
> (I could read) and carefully
> studied the photographs:
> the inside of a volcano,
> black, and full of ashes;

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[23] Even if I do not necessarily read the speaker in the poem as Bishop herself (along the lines of separating writer and lyric subject as argued by Lee Edelman in "The Geography of Gender" and Bonnie Costello in "Personal Impersonal"), I do read the main event, described in the poem, of accompanying the aunt to the dentist as based on a possible experience of the author, since also mentioned in her essay "Country Mouse." I am aware of the fact that some elements such as the aunt's name and the edition of the magazine do not necessarily correspond to the aunt's real names and the magazine editions; yet my reading of the poem does not necessarily take the accuracy of such factual details for granted.

> then it was spilling over
> in rivulets of fire.
> Osa and Martin Johnson
> dressed in riding breeches,
> laced boots, and pith helmets.
> A dead man slung on a pole
> --"Long Pig," the caption said.
> Babies with pointed heads
> wound round and round with string;
> black, naked women with necks
> wound round and round with wire
> like the neck of light bulbs.
> Their breasts were horrifying.
> I read it right straight through.
> I was too shy to stop.
> And then I looked at the cover:
> the yellow margins, the date.
> Suddenly, from inside,
> came an *oh*! of pain [. . .] (*CP* 159-160)

At this moment, the cry of pain becomes a mixture of her aunt's cry inside the dentist's office and the child's own cry of realization, possibly ignited by a particular unexpected discovery she makes, which is described later in the poem as the speaker's feeling that

> you are an I, you are an *Elizabeth*, you are one of *them*.

> *Why* should you be one, too?
> I scarcely dared to look
> to see what it was I was. (*CP* 160)

Even unwillingly, the child looks around and sees

> [. . .] shadowy gray knees,
> trousers and skirts and boots
> and different pairs of hands
> lying under the lamps. (*CP* 160)

The contrasting descriptions of the images in the *National Geographic* magazine – with its geological formations, its Western explorers, and its cultural others – and the details of "pieces of people" in the waiting room – knees, hands, clothes – leave the reader wondering why it is at this moment the child recognizes her own subject position in a particular cultural, geographical and even political location – since the "War was on. Outside" (*CP* 161). What could be the relations between the "far away" objectified pictures of a "naked" and "unknown" world and the "covered" and "known" but also mysterious and suddenly "sliding beneath a big black wave" (*CP* 161) world of the waiting room? What characteristics would "hold them together" or pull them apart? Can we (to echo once more Schwartz's idea) argue that geography does equal autobiography in Bishop's poetry?

In rescuing Schwartz's idea, I propose that we can indeed read her work as such, but from the point of view that, more than recovering an instant of identification in the biographical narrative of a particular subject, it actually recaptures the moment of recognition of positions the subject takes in the encounter with difference or the other –

or, in other words, the geography of subject positioning (how the subject gets questioned and rediscovered in the encounter with the other). This particular poem seems to be unfolding the speaker's awareness of the arbitrariness of subject positions as well. It is as if, in the moment of the child's complete absorption in the *National Geographic* magazine (when she "carefully studied the pictures" and was "too shy to look away"), she realizes that it is actually her own self who is analyzing and studying these pictures. It is at this moment the child finds the unexpected – not necessarily about the unknown world of the photograph, but about the "known" world she is surrounded by at that particular moment. The limits between known and unknown become blurred and she realizes the strangeness of reality: "I knew that nothing stranger / had ever happened, that nothing / stranger could ever happen" (*CP* 160) – maybe nothing stranger than the own self (could it be also dialoguing with Darwin's "strange undertaking?"). By reading the magazine, studying the already objectified dead man and the "horrifying" female breasts, and due to the sense of detachment of looking at them through hers and others' definitions – "long pig" or "light bulbs" – (even if she recognizes similarities between them, her aunt, and herself), the speaker realizes, maybe for the first time, her eyes pointing in the same direction as the photographers' camera or the explorers' eyes (Osa and Martin Johnson's) – she is the one looking at the other and, by extension, geographically located as the "arctic subject" in the waiting room, witnessing and exploring difference.[24]

In his essay "The Geography of Gender: Elizabeth Bishop's 'In the Waiting Room,'" Lee Edelman argues that this poem does not only present the speaker's self-awareness about the formation of individual identity but also interrogates the acts of reading and interpreting, which, for the critic, are involved in the process of poetry reading itself. Such a discussion is enabled by Edelman's disagreement with the critical consensus about the poem, which tended to emphasize the "literal certainty" of the cry of pain presented in the poem as Aunt Consuelo's voice. For Edelman, to understand the particular location of such cry "requires a more careful study of the scene of reading that comes before it and, in some sense, calls it forth" (187). So, in this critic's view of the poem, the reading of the magazine presented before the cry actually also points out to the child's realization of how specific systems of representation, such as language, inevitably inscribe its subjects in particular social and cultural positions. Throughout the discussion of the images presented in *National Geographic*, Edelman shows how Bishop challenges binary meanings of linguistic constructions, such as the relationship between "inside and outside, male and female, literal and figurative, human and bestial" (191). Edelman also reads Bishops presentation of 'wounded' or 'culturally deformed' bodies of children and women as an attempt to discuss how female bodies, in particular, are culturally inscribed and positioned inside a distinctive linguistic code. This way, for Edelman, the cry in the poem comes from the speaker's inability to repress the recognition that comes "as a result of her reading" of "the inadequacy of the inside/outside polarity that underlies each of her tensions – tensions that mount until they no longer admit of repression or constraint" (195). For this critic, the poem's cry is a cry of confusion that is against the elimination of such confusion, since it would mean definitive locations of the subject.[25]

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[24] Once more ideas of "naturalness" are explored in her writing, since what is supposedly "natural" in the poem – sitting down in a waiting room, reading a magazine – becomes unnatural: who or where is this subject to be actually the one who can read of others as a "spectacle?" Such questions can also be approached as an echo of a similar question already asked in Bishop's "Questions of Travel" (which will be later discussed in this thesis).

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[25] For another discussion of this poem, see also: Helen Vendler, "'Long Pig:' the Interconnection of the Exotic, the Dead, and the Fantastic in the Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop," *The Art of Elizabeth Bishop*, eds. Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida, Glaucia Renate Gonçalves, and Eliana Lourenço de Lima Reis (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2002) 25-40.

Although I agree with Edelman's reading of this particular poem as Bishop's questioning of the limits of representation and how arbitrary and confining those limits can be, particularly in relation to the representation and reading of the female body, I also read the poem as Bishop's awareness of her complicities in the process of representation, since when "reading the other" she discovers herself as an "I." Edelman sees the child's insistent look at the magazine cover as a way of avoiding the "questioning" of the inadequacy of representational systems. Yet, the poet also reveals:

> I said to myself: three days
> and you'll be seven years old.
> I was saying it to stop
> the sensation of falling off
> the round, turning world
> into cold, blue-black space.
> But I felt: you are an *I*,
> You are an *Elizabeth*,
> You are one of *them*. (*CP* 160)

It is almost as if the speaker's attempts to focus on both her age and the magazine cover are ways to avoid the feeling of self, the recognition of also being "one of them." Such "unexpected recognition" is described by Bishop, in her essay "The Country Mouse," as one of the "three great truths" that "came home to [her] during" the time she lived in her paternal grandparents' house (*CPr* 31). Besides her discovery of what she calls "the great power of sentimentality" (*CPr* 31) and the realization of "social consciousness" (*CPr* 32), in the dentist's waiting room she discovers *herself*: "a feeling of absolute and utter desolation came over me. I felt … *myself*" (*CPr* 32-33). Unable to deny her subjectivity and her historical or material presence in a very particular location, the essay's narrator states, "[i]t was like coasting downhill [. . .]" (*CPr* 33). The childlike naiveté of not necessarily feeling certain responsibilities about a particular social and cultural position is actually, in Bishop's words, "smashed into a tree" (*CPr* 33).

In one of her essays about "the politics of location," the poet Adrienne Rich discusses the importance of the recognition of the relationship between history and geography arguing that, "[t]ribal loyalties aside, [. . .] I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create" (212). The moment of recognition of selfhood, in Bishop's "In the Waiting Room," seems to be raising a similar concern, locating the self as historically and geographically constructed. There is a pull towards destabilization and confusion: "The waiting room was bright / and too hot. / It was sliding / beneath a big black wave" (*CP* 161). Yet, despite the disintegration of what is embedded in this waiting room, the poem ends with another reference to time and space:

> Then I was back in it.
> The War was on. Outside,
> in Worcester, Massachusetts,
> were night and slush and cold,
> and it was still the fifth
> of February, 1918. (*CP* 161)

In Bishop's poem, the subject questions her own position, but the materiality of her existence is still defined by her location in the waiting room. This particular location is not there in isolation; the poem's "cry of recognition" is directly contrasted to the *National Geographic* magazine. Again, Rich's discussion of what is involved in "the politics of location" becomes relevant to a reading of Bishop's poem. According to Rich, the recognition of her position as a white, North American woman started to be more deeply negotiated and experienced through the readings and actions of other social and cultural groups. For her,

> It was in the writings but also the actions and speeches and sermons of Black United States citizens that I began to experience the meaning of my whiteness as a point of location for which I needed to take responsibility. It was in reading poems by contemporary Cuban women that I began to experience the meaning of North America as a location which had also shaped my ways of seeing and my ideas of who and what was important, a location for which I was also responsible. (219-220)

For Rich, individual and communal locations do not exist in isolation and they carry with them a historical and geographical legacy which has to be negotiated by the subject. For me, it is exactly this recognition that is represented in Bishop's poem – not as a way to isolate the self in its realization of its 'individuality,' but actually leading the self toward the responsibilities (or solidarities) involved in historical questionings.[26]

If one is to read Bishop's poetics as a constant dialectic between inner and outer worlds, such reading can be located in how both worlds are dependent in representational practices, and how much of what is produced in art is a result of how this dependence is recognized and explored. In other words, what could be read as Bishop's "personal poetics" is actually related to how much close observation reveals subjectivity and how the subject is both shaping and shaped by the encounter with difference (or the object of representation). Taking again Bishop's interview with Wesley Wehr as an example, when responding to Wehr's claims he was reading confessional poetry, Bishop reacts: "Dear, now you've got me a bit worried about your tastes in reading matter. Maybe I'd better send you some old copies of the National Geographic" (45). Once more the implications between the dynamics involved in the relation between self and other seem very much present throughout Bishop's life. Different from my first reading of this particular interview statement, I do not look at it as an appeal for a complete self-forgetfulness. On the contrary, I see it as Bishop's very particular way of re-discovering (or re-reading) subjective positions in the interplay of different spatial locations. As the child in her poem, Bishop, the poet, realizes, not without surprise, that she is also part of the production and consumption of representational systems. Some of the implications of such re-discoveries in her poetics of travel are the focus of the next section of this present work.

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[26] See also Adrienne Rich's discussion of Bishop's poetry and its concern with the question of "outsiderhood" in Adrienne Rich, "The Eye of the Outsider: Elizabeth Bishop's *Complete Poems*, 1927-1979," *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986) 124-135.

"Looking for something, something, something:" Bishop's Poetics of Travel

The world is a mist. And then the world is
minute and vast and clear. The tide
is higher or lower. He couldn't tell you which.
His beak is focused; he is preoccupied,

looking for something, something, something.
Poor bird, he is obsessed!
The millions of grains are black, white, tan, and gray,
mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst.
Elizabeth Bishop, "Sandpiper"

In 1976, Elizabeth Bishop received this year's *Books Abroad*/Neustadt International Prize for Literature at the University of Oklahoma, an award which, according to Ivar Ivask, was "uniquely fitting" to a poet who had always demonstrated so much interest in geography and who had actually dedicated a great part of her writing to "questions of travel" (5). When accepting the prize, Bishop states: "Mr. Ivask has selected a poem called 'Sandpiper' to be printed on the program today, and when I saw that poem, rather old now, I began to think: Yes, all my life I have lived and behaved very much like that sandpiper—just running along the edges of different countries and continents, 'looking for something, something' ("Laureate's Words" 12).[27] With these words, both poet and critic recognize the meaningful links between literal and poetical geographical constructions in Bishop's art. As the sandpiper in her poem, Bishop has also "run and watched" her surroundings, and much of what she has seen and observed in the many places she has visited, lived or travelled to has been represented and discussed in her writing.

Such a seemingly straightforward relation between travel and representation is not an unproblematic endeavour, though. Not only Bishop's writing per se seems to open a space for the questioning of such relation, but also much of the theory and criticism produced in recent scholarship has debated and challenged the implications and complications involved in any kind of travel writing. The apparently "unproblematic nature" of Ivask's description of Bishop as "a masterful mediator of both familiar and strange landscapes which, thanks to her precise art, have become part of our own sensibility—*our* "Imaginary Icebergs," *our* "Questions of Travel" (5), has been deeply questioned and "problematized" in contemporary theoretical debates, particularly taking into consideration the role of the writer/observer as a mediator of cultures. The very question of "translating" different cultures so that, in Ivask's words, "they become part of our own sensibility" has been re-read by critics as embedded in a Western imperialist rhetoric of appropriation and objectification of different places and cultures, even if as an attempt to "welcome" difference in the West (in this particular case, in a North American context).

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[27] This particular quotation has also been used by Robert Giroux in his introduction to Elizabeth Bishop's *The Collected Prose* (viii).

Yet, the idea of "mediation" between familiar and unfamiliar worlds is one of the main focuses in Bishop's writing, particularly her writing on foreign places and cultures. In *Elizabeth Bishop: the Art of Travel*, Kim Fortuny presents a significant study of Bishop's poetics of travel as inserted in a North American expansionist discourse, mainly after the Second World War. According to Fortuny, Bishop would

> question the agendas of North Americans who went abroad with vague or whetted dreams of cultural colonialism. In fact, this line of questioning, this weighing of the consequences of relegating unfamiliar landscapes to familiar tropes, constitutes the ethical center of her oeuvre in general and her poems and prose written about foreign places and people in particular. (26)

While acknowledging that a reading of Bishop's work on her travels abroad has to be inserted in contemporary critical and theoretical debates which historicize and politicize the genre of travel writing itself, Fortuny also argues that Bishop's writing would anticipate theories on travel which came to the fore mainly after her death in the late 1970s (26). For Fortuny, "Bishop understood the hazards of foreign travel; she knew firsthand about the dangers of privileged observation. The risk was not to the observer, as many adventure writers would have us to believe. Rather, the real risk was always to the observed" (26). In this context, Fortuny reads Bishop's writing as exposing the biases of the North American traveller, questioning the limitations of representational practices. For Fortuny, instead of focusing on the relationship between observer and observed, Bishop's works present "a highly conscious consideration on the processes of observation, processes implicated in the dangers of the ahistorical universalization of others" (27). In her reading of poems such as "Over 2, 000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" or "Questions of Travel," Fortuny presents an analysis of how aesthetics and politics interrelate in Bishop's writing, mainly as a way to explore notions of familiar and unfamiliar constructions.

In a similar line of thought, Jonathan Ellis, in *Art and Memory in the Work of Elizabeth Bishop*, recognizes Bishop's awareness of the ambiguities of travel as never an isolated or unbiased act, but as usually involved in "commerce or contemplation" (borrowing a line from Bishop's "A Large Bad Picture"). For Ellis, Bishop would critically approach such biases on travel depicting, for instance, the practically impossible tourist's attempts of rationalizing the experience of difference through superficial exchanges with foreign cultures or places. In Ellis's reading of Bishop's published and unpublished poems, such as "Arrival at Santos" or "Travelling, A Love Poem," he shows how Bishop portrayed "questions of (how not to) travel," parodying the tourist's ambivalent actions of exoticizing or rejecting difference (113-115). Yet, for Ellis, travel, in Bishop's poetics, is more than a mere theme or trope, it is "a motto for how she thought poetry should be written" (115). In this critic's views of Bishop's poetry, travel informs both a philosophical position in relation to writing, since she "writes as if continually thinking on her feet" or in 'constant readjustment'" (118), and as a strategy to leave the self behind, as travel poems "allowed her, as Shelley suggests, to find 'the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own'" (122).[28] In this context, Ellis approaches Bishop's poetics of travel as a way to forget the self (even if as an ideal concept) and to represent experience from uncertain positions.

My own reading of Bishop's travel writing is undoubtedly informed by both Fortuny's and Ellis's readings, since both critics raise a very relevant question regarding Bishop's poetics: her interest in extrapolating or questioning the boundaries between familiar and unfamiliar experiences, and the risks involved in such activity. I agree with Ellis in his view of Bishop's use of travel as more than a metaphor or a trope, being in fact a position in writing or a way of approaching her surroundings as a journey since, as Fortuny also mentions, "[r]eading the world is like writing, and both are like traveling" (29). Certainly, much of Bishop's writing demonstrates an intense awareness of the acts of reading and writing the world around her (much as the curious traveller who attempts to describe and experience every new detail of a not-yet-travelled environment). It also seems that both critics look at this writing journeying as a way of focusing on something outside the self (or as an "escape from the self"), even if as a way to open a space for difference, or a new understanding of the process of observation and representation. According to Fortuny, "Bishop's poems and prose about foreign subjects re-enact these struggles to travel beyond the limitations the self imposes upon experience to grasp it clearly and comfortably" (29). Ellis's approach goes along similar lines since, for this critic, "[t]ravel poems were [. . .] one of Bishop's main strategies for leaving 'Elizabeth' behind" (*Art and Memory* 122). The idea of 'self-forgetfulness' is essential in these critics' readings of Bishop's interest in travel and representation; yet, in my reading, Bishop's poetics of travel is not necessarily marked by a 'forgetting' of the self, but actually by a 're-discovery' of it, or by a questioning of subjectivity, in the interplay between observation and representation. Bishop's poetics of travel and her interest in "geography lessons" acknowledge the emphasis on process since it recognizes the writer's attempts to cross the boundaries of familiar and unfamiliar perspectives, but it also focuses on the reconstruction of such boundaries, or, in other words, in a re-reading of the self. Thus, along the lines of my previous reading of Bishop's "In the Waiting Room," I approach Bishop's poetics of travel as embedded in constant mappings and un-mappings of the relationship between self and other.

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[28] Jonathan Ellis bases his reading on the connections between Bishop and Shelley in one of Bishop's assignments during her years of teaching. According to Ellis, "[o]n one of [Bishop's] first examination papers, she cited the following famous lines from Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Defence of Poetry': 'The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own.'" (119). At another moment in his discussion, Ellis also argues: "To stumble upon love and poetry, at least of the kind Bishop and Shelley value, one has always to welcome this kind of self-forgetfulness – those peculiar moments in time and space when we forget the 'I' we inhabit and imagine the 'you' we desire" (121).

Looking back at Bishop's comment on "Sandpiper," one may notice that, by identifying herself with the sandpiper of her poem, she immediately positions herself in a discourse of travel and exploration. Such discourse demands not only the obsession of observation and discovery – "looking for something, something, something" (*CP* 131) – but also an attention to details different from the self. The "hero" of her poem, this "poor bird," seems to be co-opted by this endless search, this almost inevitable attempt to master every minute detail of a world it does not necessarily control. It is almost as if, in the midst of experiencing difference, it would be the bird's (and by extension Bishop's) duty to observe everything so that those minute details do not get lost in the process of exploration.[29] In one of her letters from the 1930s, during her first visits to Europe, Bishop shows a similar line of preoccupation with close observation and representation in her exchange with a North American "audience." Writing from Douarnenez, a fishing town on the coast of Brittany, to her friend Frani Blough, Bishop opens her letter by saying: "You don't know what a blessing it is to have you be one, *the* one, friend who has been here, so I don't feel dutybound to—or maybe, I can't possibly let myself—DESCRIBE everything" (*OA* 34). Bishop's emphasis on the word "describe" demonstrates her awareness about the expectations imposed on the traveller regarding the acts of experiencing and reporting or annotating difference, particularly to an "audience" who does not necessarily share a similar experience of it.

Such overwhelming desire to observe and represent is also made clear in another letter written by Bishop, from Europe, a couple of months later. Once more she opens her letter to Frani Blough by describing her experience of Europe, particularly from France: "Europe, until you get used to it, is TIRING. I'm sure I've been needing much more sleep, and I just realized that undoubtedly in a country where everything has to be *observed*—just to make sure it isn't different from what you're used to—of course you get tired" (*OA* 36). In these very brief lines on the experience of travelling and encountering difference, again the pull between the known and the unknown seems to be the observer's focus of attention. It would be hard to say if the idea of observing everything to make it "similar" to or to translate it into what one is used to could be one of the main aims of travelling in Bishop's perspective of it. Yet, the drive towards observation as a bridge between known and unknown (or certainties and uncertainties) seems much implicated in how Bishop approaches travel and representation. Close observation approximates cultural experiences; yet this does not necessarily mean a better understanding of the other, since what is "translated" may be permeated by "false cognates." In this same letter, right after her introductory comments on observation, Bishop describes her interaction with the French maid who helps her and her friend Louise Crane in the apartment in Paris. In Bishop's words: "Louise and I decided to begin a new regime this morning. We told the maid about it, asking to be awakened at 8 a.m. henceforward. She giggled a little and then we realized that *régime* probably means 'diet' in French. She giggles every time I open my mouth, in French that is—drops plates, rushes to the kitchen with her shoulders shaking, etc" (*OA* 36). Here, the writer's first attempted position of control over experience (trying to reconcile difference through its translation into something known) is immediately challenged by the maid's giggle, a marker of a particular cultural mistranslation which disrupts the notion of mastery. The detached traveller-observer, "master" of her experience, is actually "laughed at" by her other, not in complete "command" over her mediation of cultures.[30] In this context, the idea of the "serious" nature of the travelling enterprise, as an "enriching" and "empowering" activity, is both raised and challenged over and over in Bishop's writing. It seems that one of her main questions is: "can one really make sense of the travel experience, understanding otherness by what it is?"

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[29] In "Elizabeth Bishop – Questions of Memory, Questions of Travel," David Kalstone, when discussing the links between Bishop's inner and outer landscapes, had already noticed that such landscapes "show an effort at reconstructing the world as if it were in danger of being continually lost" (12). David Kalstone, "Elizabeth Bishop – Questions of Memory, Questions of Travel," *Elizabeth Bishop and Her Art*, eds. Lloyd Schwartz and Sybil P. Estess (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1983). 3-31.

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[30] For a further discussion on Bishop and the idea of "mastery" in representation see Bonnie Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991). Also, for a further discussion on Elizabeth Bishop's travel experiences in Europe and the idea of a loss of control, see Ellis *Art and Memory* 119-131.

The ironic tone presented in the description of the French maid's giggle in Bishop's letter is repeated in her poem "Sandpiper," a poem written almost twenty years after this first European experience, when the poet had already travelled widely in Europe, North-America, and Brazil. In the poem, the sandpiper "runs, he runs to the south, finical, awkward, / in a state of controlled panic, a student of Blake" (*CP* 131). In his obsessive run, the bird defies the immensity of the Atlantic, which "hisses" and "glazes over his dark and brittle feet" (*CP* 131). Yet, running "straight through" the "interrupting water [that] comes and goes" (*CP* 131), the bird observes and notes its minuteness: "the spaces of sand [between his toes] [. . .] where (no detail too small) the Atlantic drains" (*CP* 131). The sandpiper's quest could be seen as in dialogue not only with Bishop's own quest throughout her "writing journey" but also with travel narratives of exploration in which the traveller is, supposedly, the master of his/her own experience. Yet, Bishop's poetical narrative of the sandpiper's journey is not necessarily approached from the perspective of a glorious grand-narrative of discovery. The two last stanzas of the poem (quoted as the epigraph of this section) demonstrate Bishop's attempts at reversing the "pseudo-grandiosity" of this sandpiper's enterprise: there is no final or definitive meaning to it. In the poem, both the world and the tide are intangible and paradoxical ("minute, vast and clear" or "higher or lower"), and the poem's "hero" "could not tell you which" since focused on the spaces of sand between his own feet. This "poor bird" is unable to see the wholeness of experience but is left only with the details of his obsessive quest: the mixed colours of the grains of sand. At the same moment the Atlantic touches and glazes his "brittle feet," the ocean water is immediately dragged by the sand – its "conquest" is practically impossible, its boundaries, despite their fluidity, are beyond the sandpiper's reach.[31] On the other hand, it is exactly this obsessive look at details that seems to be what matters in the poem, as if the poet recognizes in them the particularity of each experience or the unexpected moments of "reality" that, in the poem, are coloured (mixed) "with quartz grains, rose and amethyst" (*CP* 131). More than reading (as the reference to Blake may lead us to believe) "the world in a grain of sand," the grains per se are what matter, since more concrete representations of an observed "reality" – differently from the ocean's water, the grains of sand are more tangible and reveal more than their apparently minuteness may lead us to believe.

Due to her constant attention to detail and her depiction of very particular portraits of her surroundings, Bishop's travel observations have been often connected to naturalist thinking, particularly due to her affinity with the works of Charles Darwin. In "Reading Darwin: On Elizabeth Bishop's Marked Copies of *The Voyage of the Beagle* and *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*," Francesco Rognoni discusses how, through Bishop's marked and annotated copies of Darwin's works, one may perceive, in even more detail, the affinity (or admiration) Bishop had already demonstrated, in her letter to Anne Stevenson, for this scientist's observing and representational methods. For Rognoni, throughout her copies of Darwin's books, Bishop marks passages that actually sustain her view of his "endless and heroic observations" confirming "the to and fro between the imagination informing Darwin's text and that of her own poetry and letters" (241).

In his reading of "Sandpiper," which he also calls Bishop's self-portrait (246), Rognoni argues that, like Darwin and Bishop, the sandpiper focuses on minute details

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[31] The fluidity and paradoxical boundaries of the ocean in "Sandpiper" could also be read as if in dialogue with Bishop's description of the sea in "At the Fishhouses:" "It is like we imagine knowledge to be: / dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free, / drawn from the cold hard mouth / of the world, derived from the rocky breasts / forever, flowing and drawn, and since / our knowledge is historical, flowing and flown" (*CP* 66).

(grains of sand), which not only obsess him "with the glare of their pied beauty" (245), but also cause anxiety, since maybe not more than mere observations (245). Yet, for him, it is the very act of collecting these "millions of grains" that will eventually lead to the "building up of a case" that sustain her poetry (246). In this sense, it is not hard to make a parallel between Bishop's approach to observation and Darwin's naturalist approach. However, one could also say that, despite this poet's admiration of Darwin, her position in relation to poetry differs from his approach as a naturalist in the sense that she does not actually attempt any kind of "master ordering of experience" (as if ordering its "chaos" as critics such as Anne Stevenson argue, for example). Her poetics does present an obsession with searching and observing, but does not necessarily reconcile her observations in a master or grand narrative of discovery (her sandpiper does not master experience). The "unexpected glimpses" of reality she is able to see or relate to (the quartz grains, rose and amethyst of the everyday black, white, tan and gray) do not necessarily redeem her obsessive quest. On the contrary, they actually demonstrate the ambivalence of representational processes, particularly if related to the endeavour of travel.

The ambivalence of the obsessive search, articulated in a poem such as "Sandpiper," has not only been approached as a discussion on perspective and possibility, but also as a source of doubt and anxiety over the nature of representational practices. In another letter, written in the 1940s, Bishop demonstrates some uncertainties about what is "seen" in foreign contexts. In this letter, written to Marianne Moore, Bishop describes her travels to Mexico, particularly to a place called Mérida (in Yucatán), where she and her friend Marjorie Stevens stayed for a while before travelling to Mexico City. Bishop describes a particular visit to Progreso, a port town where she spent the day with a Mexican family at the house of a friend's aunt. Besides describing the particularities of her day in this place, Bishop includes some details on the organization of space, both in the city and at the house she was visiting. Her focus is on the smallness of the place, and she describes her surprise in how people dealt with this particular space:

> we got on the tiniest trolley car I have ever seen [. . .] and went round and round the town, so close to all the little buildings you could touch them. [. . .] We made the trolley trip twice, then went to—or rather stepped into, from the trolley which almost deposited us in the living room—the aunt's house, which was also very small, like all of them, and made of stone, and right on a beautiful beach. [. . .] The house had three small rooms and a kitchen (with them, besides their two children, our hostesses had five Indian servants, women, and one of the women's husband! But they conserve space, very sensibly I think, by all sleeping in hammocks). After lunch we were each stowed away in one, our first such experience, and we both slept two and a half hours. I think it is a pity they have never been adopted in Key West—they are beautiful to look at, and all the women looked extremely graceful lying in them, and they are cool and clean, and don't take up any space in the daytime, and are very comfortable. (*OA* 109)

In Bishop's description of this particular visit, her experience is filtered by her redefinition of a sense of space. The ambivalence of such descriptions lies in the fact that, in her mediation of this experience, through her emphasis on the "small trolley car" and on the "small buildings she almost touched" during the car trip, it is as if she had transformed the city in a miniature town, almost a toy town, where she was "playing." In her descriptions of Progreso, Bishop appears more as a character out of a fairy tale than a "serious traveler-explorer" deciphering her other. After her comments on this visit, Bishop ends her letter saying: "I'm afraid I made rather too much of our outing, and that again I've presented myself as the grasshopper-type girl, but you know I have a serious nature, really, Marianne. I can't help letting these details, however inappropriate, distract and entertain me" (*OA* 110). Again the seriousness of the enterprise of travelling and representing is called into question.

Depicting herself as the "grasshopper-type" (maybe much later articulated in her poetry as the "Sandpiper"), Bishop recognizes her observations may be distracting and entertaining instead of serious considerations of the nature of travel. However, by perceiving the details about the organization of space in Progreso Bishop also notices something about social relations in this space, the proximity of people, a certain contrast between formality and informality in social status (the dynamics of the household) and even gender relations (a highly feminine space). Moreover, her focus on the hammocks also re-enacts the interplay between visible and invisible boundaries between self and other. She abandons herself in the hammock (sleeping for more than two hours) but her eye/I, despite "stowed away," is constantly observing (mainly the gracefulness of the women lying on them). The particularity of the experience is detailed in her writing but her mind is also in Key West. The simplicity of detail (the hidden-visible hammocks) marks a position to the subject (a re-reading of the self).

In this context, it can be said that Bishop's travel poetics is unavoidably linked to a reading of details (or literalness) as a way into the reading of perspective and possibility. Yet, this approach does not mean superficiality of thought or impressionistic constructions of her surroundings. Kim Fortuny argues that "Bishop was not a travel writer per se [. . .] [as] she did not go abroad with the express intention of recording her experiences as many of her contemporaries did," and that she even feared to be seen as a "chronicler of the exotic and 'picturesque'" (25), particularly after her experience in Brazil. Taking a contrary view, Jeffrey Gray maintains that Bishop "is the United States' principal travel poet" (24); a poet who "chose travel as a defining activity of her life" (25). Her reflections on the constructions of the experiences of travelling and representing can be approached as careful considerations of the relationship between observations and subjectivity. For Silviano Santiago, what locates Bishop apart from the "tourist" or "common traveler" is that the "poet's experience [...] is not (it may even have been...) recorded in words immediately poured down on paper in agreement with the spur of the moment and sentimental spontaneity. Those would be the features of the quick notes and the tourist's or traveller's impressions on distant lands" (15). Santiago's view of Bishop's writing acknowledges the obsession with detail and observation, yet it also points out towards the poet's craft of transforming such observations into a reordering of the experience in relation to the poet's subjectivity. For him, the "renderings of the event [. . .], the reorganizations of memory traces, may and must be considered as allegories of the self" (23).

If we look at Bishop's writing as such a "return of the self," it is not necessarily in the direction of her personal or private life, but in fact as an understanding of her "visions" on the poetical craft, or maybe her "looks" – a word critics have already noticed she uses instead of visions since, as she argues in "Poem," "'visions' is / too serious a word" (*CP* 177). Her attention to detail demonstrates a way of "looking" that acknowledges the limits of close observation (as the sandpiper, which cannot look beyond the grains of sand); yet, it is exactly because of the details of observation that images can be freshly approached again, similar to what Fortuny calls Bishop's "undermining of the automatic reaction" (42). For this critic, Bishop is aware of how writing can automatically reinsert particular readings of difference in a pre-established or stereotyped narrative of the other. Fortuny also says that

> Bishop made this awareness a subject in her writing. The superficial insights of the picturesque, the automatic, underweighed reaction to foreign experience, point to the complex problems of representation that travel and writing about it pose. To read the foreign subject well and write about it when one has few illusions about one's capacity to step beyond the limitations of culture puts extraordinary pressure on the work—pressure under which language, more often than not, collapses. (41)

Fortuny reads poems such as "2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" in this light. In Fortuny's reading, this poem can be approached as a discussion of the failures of language as a means to understand and represent the experience of difference. What seems interesting to me in this poem is that this "failure" comes exactly from the speaker's attempt to define "serious or engraving" travel narratives. Reflecting upon the kinds of images represented in a family Bible, the poem opens with what seems a definitive conclusion on the acts of travelling: "Thus should have been our travels: / serious, engravable" (*CP* 57). Yet, this particular recognition is immediately challenged, not only by the images presented in the sacred or serious book that, through its frequent Oriental representations of the "squatting Arab [. . .] plotting against our Christian Empire" (*CP* 57), reproduce a discourse of exploration and religious domination, but also bread to gold" (13). Besides such appreciations, her work has been the focus of special journal and magazine editions, such as the 1996 issue of *The Malahat Review*, edited by Jay Ruzesky, the collection of essays edited by Rogers and Peace in 2001, or the 2004 edition of the *Journal of Canadian Studies*. These forms of recognition demonstrate how important her work has become to Canadian letters.

Page is a very prolific writer as well. Throughout a career of almost seventy years, she has published more than twenty books, including poetry, fiction, essays, a journal, children's narratives and a memoir. Apart from her writing, she has also a career as a painter, having obtained a space in some of the largest and most important galleries in Canada, such as the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.[2] With such a variety of work and in such a long and productive career, Page's writing cannot really be described as belonging to a particular movement or epoch. She was originally associated with the Canadian Modernist Movement as a member of the *Preview* group in the 1940s, yet since then, her work (as her own life) has taken many different routes and turns.

In Page's trajectory, one of the turns that interests me most (and that will be the main focus of this chapter) is her travel experience in the Americas, particularly in Brazil. Although she spent only two years living in Rio de Janeiro, this experience was for her a really impressive one, and left its marks both in her writing and in her own life. Also, even if her writing on Brazil does not constitute a major part of her body of work, the opportunity to live in such a different and unexpected place deeply affected Page, leading some critics to describe her works as "pre" or "post" Brazil. Nevertheless, despite the fact that my main interest in this chapter is to explore this particular path in Page's career and poetical trajectory, it seems unfair to follow her in such a path without at least acknowledging some of the main routes of her life journey. Thus, in order to contextualize her "Brazilian experience," what follows is a brief description of her biographical information, and also on how her work has been critically approached over the years.

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[2] References on the width of her publications and visual work are from Pollock 5-8.

Page's Life Journey: "Never resist[ing] the going train of the dream"

The mole is a specialist and truly
opens his own doors; digs as he needs them
his tubular alleyways; and all his hills
are mountains left behind him.
"The Mole," P.K. Page

Patricia Kathleen Page was born in Swanage, England, in 1916. Two years after her birth, her family moved back to Canada, where they had already been living and where Page's father, Lionel F. Page, was a member of the army.[3] She spent most of her childhood in the Canadian prairies, living in places such as Red Deer and Calgary (Alberta), and Winnipeg (Manitoba). According to Page, besides the prairie landscape and its wildflowers, which she would paint and learn about from her mother (Wachtel 44), her childhood was also filled with poetry since, in her words, she "grew up in a very word-conscious family" to whom "the sound of words was important" (Wachtel 43). Such an environment, where artistic creation and imagination were always present, was a great stimulus for Page's interest in writing poetry in her teenage years. After finishing high school in Calgary, she spent a year in London, England, where she was immersed in its cultural life, "feeling absolutely overwhelmed by what [she] was seeing" (Djwa, "Interview" 38). According to Sandra Djwa, London represented to Page "her first experience of modern art: she discovered the ballet, the theatre and the new poetry and prose" ("Portrait" 13). It was also there that Page published her first poem.

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[3] The biographical information presented here is based mainly on Orange; Rose; and Stiles.

In 1935, Page returned to Canada to live with her family in New Brunswick, and was involved in many different activities. She had a job at a bookstore in Saint John, but she also worked reading and writing for CBC radio, and contributed to the local theatre. At the end of the 1930s, she joined the Canadian Authors Association, through which she met Alan Crawley who was starting a new magazine called *Contemporary Verse* on the West Coast. Page's association with Crawley was very important for her career, since he would act as one of her first editors and reviewers. Moreover, through him, she published some poems in other literary magazines, and her contributions to *Contemporary Verse* continued over a period of more than ten years (from the beginning of the 1940s to the mid-50s). For Dean Irvine, Crawley's editorial suggestions and the culture of a magazine such as *Contemporary Verse* influenced much of Page's poetics, both before and after her affiliation with the *Preview* group (24). In the late 1930s, Page was also writing her first prose narrative, later called *The Sun and the Moon* (which was published only in 1944, under the pseudonym of Judith Cape).

In 1941, Page moved to Montreal with the support of her family. Living initially with a monthly allowance of eighty-five dollars from her father, she would take writing very seriously. Despite the fact that, according to Page, at this time she did not write very well, she would act as "an employed writer" writing "from about 9 to 12 and 1:30 to 5" (Djwa, "Interview" 41). By 1942, Page met the *Preview* group, through which she was introduced to people like Patrick Anderson, F.R. Scott, A.J.M. Smith, and A.M. Klein. Since the members of *Preview* met regularly to discuss their own works (to be edited and published at the *Preview* magazine), and to read and study the writing and trends of other contemporary writers, Page was introduced to socialist thought and many aspects of Modernist aesthetics. It was also a time when she actually dived into writing, and according to her, her relationship with the *Preview* group was not only "an intellectual awakening" (Djwa, "Interview" 42), but it was also stimulating, since she would come to every meeting with one or two poems (Djwa, "Interview" 44). Moreover, according to Djwa, Page was deeply influenced by the *Preview* group's discussions of Eliot's view of metaphor ("Portrait" 19). Page's understanding of Eliot's "objective correlative" permeated a great part of her poetry of the 1940s, and, for Djwa, it was also Page's "way of distancing the personal through a series of metaphors that generate an emotional experience, similar to the original experience which gave rise to the poem, but not specifically tied to the narrating poet" ("Portrait" 19).[4] Thus, a greater sense of distancing and impersonality can be felt in Page's poetics at this time. In 1944, Page published a selection of poems in an anthology called *Unit of Five*, and in 1946, her first book of poems, *As Ten as Twenty*.

Despite the great influence of modern and social aesthetics on Page's work, especially during her time in Montreal, the criticism on her poetry had always been controversial. In *P.K. Page and Her Works*, John Orange has shown, for example, how, since the beginning of Page's career, critics such as John Sutherland and A.J.M. Smith initiated a critical debate about her work, interpreting it as either following sociological or metaphysical concerns (11). For Orange, while Sutherland would usually emphasize Page's social concerns as "a step forward" in her career, even if "he insisted that Page was a Marxist *manqué*," Smith would focus on the transcendental aspects of Page's poetry, valuing "her Freudian (or at least psychological) and metaphysical poems as her best work" (11). Indeed, many other critics have noted such conflicting aspects of Page's poetics. According to Irvine, despite Page's attempts at objectivity and distancing of voice when associated to the *Preview* group, she was in a constant struggle to find a balance between a poetics of personality and impersonality (25). He reminds us of the fact that, even during her time in Montreal, Page was still publishing in *Contemporary Verse* and keeping an editorial relationship with Crawley, who, unlike the members of *Preview*, would stimulate Page's use of personal voice and experience. Crawley's influence on Page's modernism is "marked by its subjectivist, gender-conscious turn and a self-critique of her impersonalist poetics" (Irvine 27). Irvine seems interested in showing that Page's struggle between subjectivity and objectivity represents her unconscious search for a balance between her female voice in a predominantly male modern world; it is interesting to note that what Irvine calls Page's "unsynthesized subjective-objective dialectic" (28) is an aspect that has constantly returned to debates on Page's works.

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[4] In this same essay, Djwa also quotes Eliot's argument: "the only way for expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion" (qtd. in "Portrait" 19).

In 1946, Page moved to Ottawa to work for the National Film Board as a script writer. After working there for a few years, she met William Arthur Irwin, Commissioner of the NFB, and in 1950 they got married. Irwin started a diplomatic career and in 1953 Page accompanied him in his appointed position as a Canadian High Commissioner in Australia. They lived there from 1953 to 1956. During this time, Page continued to write and in 1954 she published her second book of poems, *The Metal and the Flower*, which won the Governor's General Award. According to Marilyn Russell Rose, in this second collection, Page rescued a familiar theme for her, such as "perception, and the subjectivity inherent in all 'seeing'" (138).

After Australia, Irwin was appointed the Canadian ambassador to Brazil, where they lived from 1957 to 1959. Curiously, during their time there, Page stopped writing poetry, yet she kept a journal about her experiences in the country (which was eventually published, almost thirty years later, in 1987, by the name of *Brazilian Journal*). Though not writing poetry at this time, Page turned to the visual arts, becoming interested in drawing and painting, an activity that continued not only during her stay in Brazil, but also through the whole period she lived in Mexico (from 1960-1964), when her husband was named the ambassador to that country. In Brazil, she studied drawing with people such as Frank Schaeffer. In 1960, she had her first exhibition in Toronto. According to Orange, Page spent her autumns in New York with her husband in the years of 1959 and 1960. There, she had the opportunity to study at major art schools. She also took lessons with Charles Seliger, and during her stay in Mexico she had many exhibitions there (4-5).

In 1964, both Page and her husband returned to Canada, settling in Victoria, where she has been living ever since. Three years after their return, Page published *Cry Ararat! Poems New and Selected*, which was well received after almost ten years of poetical silence. For Orange, critics and reviewers welcomed Page's new book, and "some noticed that the seventeen new poems dealt with perspective, vision through art, and the integrative aspects of the imagination" (13). Indeed, many critics noticed that Page's initial social and objective writing started to move towards a more "visionary" and subjective poetics, a characteristic that was even more emphasized after the publication of *P.K. Page: Poems Selected and New*, in 1974. For Orange, at this time, Page was known as a "poet-visionary more than a social critic" (13-14), and some other "labels" started to be applied to her work. In 1974, for example, Frank Davey called Page an "anti-life poet" (234) interested in transforming the confusion and corruption of daily experience into "the visually patterned stillness of art" (231). Four years later, Rosemary Sullivan called Page "an almost entirely visual poet" (33). In her reading of Page's poem "After Rain," Sullivan could see Page's concern with her "image-making process" and her attempt to move toward the construction of meaning and symbolic language. Moreover, for Sullivan, Page was also "a poet of the imagination," and her poetry was more related to "folklore, myth, and archetype than with objective time, history, and social fact" (35). Page's use of imagination and metaphor was, in Sullivan's opinion, much greater and gifted than her first concerns with objectivity and "human dilemma" (35).

In the 1980s, Page published two more books of poems, *Evening Dance of the Grey Flies* (1981) and *The Glass Air* (1985). Imagination, vision, and perception continued to be the main concepts that permeated her criticism at the time. In 1988, George Woodcock, for example, argued that "from starting off as a rather intellectual poet, concerned with concepts, Page turned to the practice, which she has since developed so brilliantly, of using sharply visualized images to evoke states of mind" ("Glitter" 16). For Woodcock and others, Page's imagery leads the reader to have different perceptions or focuses of the world, revealing "unexpected and luminous relationships" ("Smith's People" 103). Some critics have also observed that Page's interest in altered levels of consciousness and different perceptions of the common reality may have been strongly influenced by her reading of Sufi philosophy. In Marilyn Rose's view, Page's "exploration [. . .] of Persian poets of the twelfth to fifteenth century and the

Sufi philosophy out of which they write, seems to have intensified Page's own metaphysical concerns" (144). In this context, Page's work started to be approached as also dealing with the mystical nature of art.

The last two decades have brought the publication of Page's *The Glass Air, Poems Selected and New* (1991), which is a revised version of the previous collection; *Hologram* (1994), a book of glosas;[5] *And Once More Saw the Stars* (2001), a book of poems co-authored with Philip Stratford; *Planet Earth: Poems Selected and New* (2002); and *Cosmologies* (2003). Besides these poetry collections, Page's works include: a selection of prose narratives edited by Margaret Atwood in 1974 and titled *The Sun and the Moon and Other Fiction*, an anthology edited by Page and called *To Say the Least: Canadian Poets from A to Z* (1979), her memoir *Brazilian Journal* (1987), her short prose *Unless the Eye Catch Fire* (1994), another collection of prose titled *A Kind of Fiction* (2001), and five books for children, *A Flask of Sea Water* (1989), *The Travelling Musicians* (1991), *The Goat that Flew* (1994), *A Grain of Sand* (2003), and *A Brazilian Alphabet for the Younger Reader* (2005). Also, her collected poems were published in the two-volume anthology *The Hidden Room* (1997). In 2006, her *Hand Luggage – A Memoir in Verse* was also published.

Even with this brief description of Page's life and career, it is not difficult to perceive the greatness and variety of her work, and the different trends in which her writing has been approached over the years. The criticism of the last two decades seems to have acknowledged Page's concerns with subjectivity and the role of the poet as a destabilizing force inside a culture. Some critics also agree that she moved from a more objective and social poetry to a more subjective one. Moreover, one does not have to go too deep into the criticism of her oeuvre to realize that Page has already been given many different labels or classifications. From the 1970s "poet-visionary" (Orange 13), to "mystical" (Bashford and Ruzesky 113), "ecocritical" (Kelly), "exotic storyteller" (Rogers 7), or "metaphysician" (Peace and Parsons 37), the adjectives used to describe both Page and her work are varied and most of the times perceptive.

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[5] In her Foreword to *Hologram*, Page defines the form of the glosa as "the opening quatrain written by another poet; followed by four ten-line stanzas, their concluding lines taken consecutively from the quatrain; their sixth and ninth lines rhyming with the borrowed tenth. Used by the poets of the Spanish court, the form dates back to the late 14th and early 15th century" (9).

Considering that Page is a prolific writer, one may think that such a struggle to pin down her work can be read as a strategy to cope with a certain critical anxiety to create a meaningful trajectory or a coherent line to Page's work. Such an anxiety is perceptively described by Erica Sue Kelly, who argues that

> [c]ritics seem more comfortable with Page's work when they can find convenient labels for her; thus, according to the critical conversation, she begins as a Modernist poet, moves towards subjectivity, becomes interested in perspective, and, post-Brazil, becomes transcendental in her concerns, voicing a mysticism dismissed as otherworldly. (12)

This "chronological" and even "orderly" approach does give a sense of direction in Page's poetical trajectory, but it also strongly emphasises Page's "divided poetics." According to Kelly, this kind of approach reflects the most asked question among Page critics: "is her poetic voice subjective or objective?" (8). In Kelly's perspective, the attempt to "break down" Page's poetry into separate categories does not reflect the wholeness of her poetics since one aspect of her writing does not exclude the other. She also argues that, although critics usually see Page's early work as "marred by a compulsion to list endless images and represents a direction that Page would later regret" (13), Page's work can be approached in terms of continuity, especially regarding her political concerns. For Kelly, Page's early political interest is actually reflected in her later poetical concerns with the environment, and with a greater awareness about the transformative power of art (20). Kelly attempts to use Page's continuous political interest as a thread to connect her body of work. Although Page's poetry may be seen as having more than only one specific thread connecting its whole, Kelly's argument for a more interrelated reading of Page's works is indeed very insightful.

Page herself seems interested in ideas of continuity and connectedness. In some of her interviews and conversations, she has acknowledged that her poetry has changed, as it most likely would as part of a process of artistic creation. Her use of images, for example, and how "pelted with images [she] was when [she] was young" has, from her point-of-view, changed, particularly after she wrote "After Rain" (qtd. in Bashford and Ruzesky 119). Nevertheless, as part of a process, Page's poetry is the place of her own experimentation and discovery. Though acknowledging change, she also says, "I don't think I have renounced any of my earlier concerns" (Bhelande, "In Conversation" 40). Difference and variety do not mean the closing and opening of opposing doors. On the contrary, these doors are simultaneously opened and explored in her artistic creations, since they are always passages to different possibilities. "Kaleidoscope" (a poem much cited by her critics) could be seen as an example of Page's interest in focusing exactly on the many playful pieces that constitute one's art. In this poem, as the kaleidoscope, which is constantly opened "to shift and flux and flow" (*HR* 2: 161), poetry is also in constant movement. Nevertheless, despite the apparent freedom involved in the multiplication of the kaleidoscopic images, in its art

> We move
> interdependent
> paired in serious play
> that is not play.
> Part of the art
> of dance. (*HR* 2: 161)

For Page, in the serious play involved in the artistic quest, everything is connected. Her journey is multiple, and yet, "all-ways joined / to every other thing" (*HR* 2: 162).

It is through this line of thought that Page's work will be approached in this chapter. My main focus here is on Page's writing on Brazil and on her experiences there, yet this writing on the Brazilian surroundings is also connected to her whole body of work. Since Page's travels in the Americas (mainly in Brazil) represented an important phase in her life trajectory, many critics see it as a mark in her career, or as a transitional point for her writing. The break Brazil meant to her poetry (particularly in terms of her poetical silence during the years she was living there) has been usually approached as a "renewal" or a "reformulation" of her poetical concerns, especially in terms of her poetics of personality and impersonality, or of her use of images and perception. However, my intention here is not necessarily to recreate such a divided narrative of *pre* and *post* Brazil in Page's poetry. Even recognizing that her journeys in this country really left profound marks in her artistic career, I will not see it as the closing of her "pre-Brazil" self. On the contrary, I will approach her Brazilian experience as a unique phase of her journey, but at the same time, I will read it in terms of connectedness since Brazil represented an unexpected space where Page could literally experiment with questions that had always interested her, such as journeying, searching, observing, and representing. Moreover, when living in Brazil, Page could further reflect on the limits and "fallibility" of language as a means of representation, and she becomes once more interested in questions of subjectivity and personality. Thus, her travels can definitely be approached as a space for poetical reflection as well. Choosing a path to follow Page's journey is never an easy decision, though. For Christine Wiesenthal, because of Page's multifaceted artistic career and her constant regrouping and readjusting of her poetry, "there's always a new syntax to [her] body of work" (17). However, instead of approaching this characteristic as a disadvantage to my own reading of Page's work, I consider it a great opportunity to re-read her writing on Brazil and create a new set of connections (a new syntax) to her work as a whole.

P.K. Page's Travels: "a destination but no maps"

Now we touch continents
with our little fingers,
swim distant seas
and walk on foreign streets
wearing crash helmets
of permanent beliefs.
"Generation," P.K. Page

In the essay "Questions and Images," published for the first time in 1969, Page discusses her travel experiences in the Americas from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s. She starts her essay by saying that, "The last ten years span three distinct places – and phases – in my life: Brazil, Mexico, Canada, in that order. All countries of the new world" (187).[6] Page's particular journey in the Americas (especially in Brazil and Mexico) is indeed a movement into new and unexpected worlds each place represents to her. Even though these destinations are not her direct choice (since as an ambassador's wife, Page would accompany her husband in his designated posts around the world), these places become more than mere geographical destinations in her trajectory. They become spaces of "re-discovery," where Page is able to experiment and articulate notions of travelling, encountering, and representing cultural difference.

Apart from a few poems on Brazil and Mexico published after her return to Canada, "Questions and Images" is one of Page's first attempts to publicly describe her experience in the Americas. It is interesting to note that it took her quite some time to be able to write about her journeys in these countries, as though she had to wait a few years before "ordering" her experience into words. More than a description of her travel accounts in the new land, this essay is also a debate about ideas of novelty, difference, and transformation. However, despite these countries' dissimilarities, Page starts her essay with a connection: they are "[a]ll countries of the new world." Such places, with possibly irreconcilable differences in their histories, traditions, and cultures, are united in Page's sentence through their location in the Americas. With this affirmation, Page seems to establish a dialogue on the idea of a 'new world' propagated by colonial explorers who would believe themselves as the "discoverers" of a new land, and even a new continent. Yet, what are the implications of such connections in Page's own movements inside the American continent?

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[6] Although this essay was originally published in *Canadian Literature* (1969), all my quotations from it are from its publication in *The Glass Air – Selected Poems* (1985).

The notion of "re-discovery" seems to be inevitably connected to Page's travel experiences. For her, the "new world" is indeed "new" to her eyes, which are not exactly accustomed to its cultural differences. In her crossing of boundaries in South and North America, Page is overcome by imagistic details: from the Brazilian "flowering jungle" with its kapok tree, flamboyant, and Doric palms (187), to the "images of darkness" that "hovered for [her] in the Mexican sunlight" (188). When she finally returns to Canada, there is "the start of a new day" (190). With these experiences, Page is in a way re-occupying the position of the travelling explorer, journeying and encountering different peoples, cultures, and traditions. She discovers herself as a "re-discoverer" as well, realizing she is traversing North and South, finding and "cataloguing" new images. Page also acknowledges that, "[i]t was a privilege to live in another country long enough to have some understanding of it and familiarity with it and a pleasure to find new stars in the sky, new flora, new fauna" (qtd. in Wachtel 53). Thus, both pleasure and privilege make part of Page's experience of travel.

Yet, such apparently privileged experience of the contemporary explorer is not as "comfortable" as one might think. Living in what she calls "my first foreign language" (187), Page is left without words. In her encounters with cultural difference, Page "re-discovers" herself as a "mute observer, an inarticulate listener, occupying another part of myself" (188). Unable to fully understand the foreign language Brazil as a whole represented to her, Page is left with doubt and with a profound questioning of her own modes of representation. Her encounters with difference lead her to a re-discovery of her own position in relation to her "other" and also in relation to her "self." Facing such a new and unexpected reality as the one she finds in her travels in the Americas, Page sees herself as more than a "detached" observer: she is actually part of this "new world," and is even modified by it.

Such recognitions are indeed very significant for Page's poetical trajectory. Even before her travel experiences in the Americas, she had always been interested in questions of perception, and in the expectations involved in observation and representation. At the beginning of her career and also during the publication of her first two books of poems, Page's poetry is marked by a "poetics of impersonality." She focuses on perspective, but is even more concerned with objective representations of what she sees. As briefly discussed in the previous section, Page's poetics were, in part, under the influence of the literary period she was living in. Being in touch with modern literary theories on objectivity and impersonality, Page would also try to reflect these ideas on her poetry. In many of Page's poems from this period, she would portray characters, people, and situations through a variety of images which allowed her to explore imagination without being co-opted in a subjective rhetoric. In what are usually considered her "social poems," one can see the 'keen eye' observing and representing other characters which are separate from the self, but whose actions and appearances are noted and described in detail. In the much quoted poem, "The Stenographers," for example, the female workers' dry routine is mixed with their memories of childhood and "freedom," allowing Page to show the constriction of these workers' daily lives:

> After the brief bivouac of Sunday,
> Their eyes, in the forced march of Monday to Saturday,
> Hoist the white flag, flutter in the snow storm of paper,
> Haul it down and crack in the midsun of temper.

In the pause between the first draft and the carbon
They glimpse the smooth hours when they were children–
The ride in the ice-cart, the ice-man's name,
The end of the route and the long walk home; (*HR* 1: 102)

In this poem, the richness of images, the attentive detail, and the objectivity of description lead the reader's attention away from the observer, and focuses it on the observed. Also, the portrayal of the stenographers' eyes hoisting, fluttering, hauling down and cracking are contrasted to the observer's eyes which see and perceive all these actions without being caught (or tied) by them.

Poems such as "Spring," "The Condemned," "The Bands and the Beautiful Children," "The Sick," "Man with One Small Hand," and many others are examples of her use of images to distance the personal voice from the "object" being described. In these poems, the speaker (observer) leads the reader's own gaze toward a variety of characters, who are constantly coming in and out the observing eye. As the main observed character of her poem "Landlady," who obsessively examines and describes her boarders

who come and go,
impersonal as trains. Pass silently
the craving silence swallowing her speech;
click doors like shutters on her camera eye [. . .] (*HR* 1: 97)

Page also obstinately gazes at her characters in a frantic move outside the self. In such a relationship, observer and observed seem to be completely detached. The characters are mere objects of attention and description, and there seems to be no real involvement between them.

Commenting on her poetics of impersonality in the interview "Entranced," Page says, "I was looking out. I was looking at the man with one small hand, or the old man in the garden, or the stenographers, typists. It wasn't often that I was looking at myself, although I suppose in some sense I was the man with the small hand, the old man in the garden, etcetera" (Bashford and Ruzesky 120). With comments like these, Page acknowledges an interest in perspective and also an interest in something that could be considered different from the self, even though she also admits the return to the self in the act of looking away from it. It is exactly this idea of "looking out," of observing like a "camera" eye (Bashford and Ruzesky 121), which has deeply marked Page's poetry since the beginning of her career. She seems to demonstrate a poetical fascination with the relationship between self and other, and a "need" to go out of oneself. As the landlady of her poem who "like a lover, must know all, all, all" (*HR* 1: 98), Page seems very much interested in apprehending a different or other perspective.

In 1978, Constance Rooke had already perceived Page's interest in questions of otherness and difference. Commenting on the poem "Stories of Snow," Rooke describes Page's awareness in relation to different perspectives of reality, since the poem seems to express a need of the self to go out of one's own experience. The poem reads:

> Those in the vegetable rain retain
> an area behind their sprouting eyes
> held soft and rounded with the dream of snow
> precious and reminiscent as those globes—

souvenir of some never nether land—
which hold their snow storms circular, complete,
high in a tall and teakwood cabinet.

In countries where the leaves are large as hands
where flowers protrude their fleshy chins
and call their colours
an imaginary snow storm sometimes falls
among the lilies. (*HR* 1: 53)

According to Rooke, this "poem is an account of the yearning to be other than we are, expressed as well by the desire to be in another place" (173-174). Despite being dated, Rooke's article actually brings an important point regarding Page's poetical interest in the relations between self and other. It seems that the self in Page's poetry is frequently in search for its opposites, dualities, and differences. Indeed, Page herself has commented that even the idea of writing a poem such as "Stories of Snow" came from her desire for something she was missing. In her interview with Djwa, she tells us that she wrote this poem when she had moved to British Columbia with her mother: "'Stories of Snow' began at a Christmas dinner in Victoria in our first year when I was very homesick for snow" ("Interview" 45). It is exactly this idea of "stories" one is not living, but only hearing about (as the ones about the Dutch hunters told in the poem) that open up the imagination and guide Page's last images of the poem:

And stories of this kind are often told
in countries where great flowers bar the roads

> with reds and blues which seal the route to snow—
> as if, in telling, raconteurs unlock
> the colour with its complement and go
> through to the area behind the eyes
> where silent, unrefractive whiteness lies. (*HR* 1: 54)

Page is aware of the idea of opposition, and at the same time, of the idea of complement. For her, "[w]hite pulls forth green, snow pulls forth spring" (Wachtel 53). Such a yearning for difference and otherness can also be interpreted, according to Rooke, as a yearning for a totality in perspective, particularly noted in the last two verses of the last stanza.[7]

Page's yearning for difference and her interest in opposites, contrasts, and encounters take another dimension when she begins her travels as an ambassador's wife. It is when she is in a new country, surrounded by difference, that she fully recognizes the powerfulness of the "eye" and the complexities related to the acts of "observing" and "gazing." Paradoxically, she also recognizes that in a place where she is not really "at home," there is an abundance of images which invade her, but for which she does not have immediate "explanation," leading her to a loss of certainties in relation to the acts of naming and representing. More than a seemingly detached observer, Page realizes she is modified by the new surroundings, occupying as well the position of the other. Such questioning is already present in Page's writing since her time in Australia. In her poem "Arras," for example, written "in the early 1950s," when Page was "sitting in an Australian garden under a magnolia tree" (Young 23), one can already notice Page's concerns with the transformation of subjectivity involved in experiencing difference. In the poem, she asks,

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[7] It is relevant to note Elizabeth Bishop's similar concern with the relationship between self and other, observer and observed (see discussion in Chapter 1).

> Who am I
>
> Or who am I become that walking here
>
> I am observer, other, Gemini,
>
> Starred for a green garden of cinema? (*HR* 1: 46)

In such completely new scenery, transformation is inevitable, and Page realizes that it is through her own eyes that difference is apprehended. Difference and its creative power seem to be represented in this poem by the presence of the peacock, which is noticed by the observer's eyes and leads her to confess:

> It was my eye.
>
> Voluptuous it came.
>
> Its head the ferrule and its lovely tail
>
> folded so sweetly; it was strangely slim
>
> to fit the retina. And then it shook
>
> and was a peacock – living patina,
>
> eye-bright – maculate!
>
> Does no one care? (*HR* 1: 47)[8]

Page does care and in this poem she accurately reveals the importance of the eye to the perception of difference. It is through a constant attention to observation that the creative power is actually released, revealing also its subjective perspective.

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[8] In her interview with P.K. Page, Sandra Djwa asks the poet about "Arras" and the image of the peacock, which Page acknowledges as "the life force. The creative power" (47).

Nevertheless, despite the diversity of images Australia already represents to Page during the time she has to live there, it is, paradoxically only in her travels in the Americas that she experiences a profound encounter with "otherness." Australia is still, in some sense, part of Page's cultural imagery. She talks about it as if "she already knew" it before travelling there, maybe because it belongs to a similar cultural (British colonial) background. In "Australian Journal" (published in *The Malahat Review*), Page describes her impressions upon her arrival in Canberra: "There is something odd about this experience. Although it is unfamiliar it is not unexpected. Perhaps I have read too much" (6). And she continues: "None of these things feels like a new experience, yet it is not quite *déjà vu*. Somehow I am already prepared and unsurprised – standing at ease (6)."[9] There is a certain sense of images she had already anticipated, heard about, or even experienced before. Yet, when she arrives in a country like Brazil, everything seems completely different and unexpected: new language, new cultural background, new landscape, and new people – indeed a new world. It is through the experience of such unanticipated "other" that her perception of the relationship between observer and observed is deeply challenged.

The cultural shock Page undergoes during her travel experiences in the Americas leads her to a re-discovery not only of new surroundings but also of her own cultural conditioning.[10] Living in countries where she has to learn everything anew, she starts to reflect on the many layers involved in the acts of seeing and representing, and how one is very much influenced by his or her own culture. Douglas Freake has argued that in her essay, "Questions and Images," Page tries to formulate questions about the "mysteries of selfhood," which are "crystallized in part by her experiences of life in Brazil and Mexico, and then by the shock of her return to Canada" (94-95). Having to learn new cultural habits, new languages, new behaviours, and even new modes of artistic representation, Page realizes that her travel experiences deeply modify her, much more than she could have anticipated. In "Questions and Images," she argues that upon homecoming, "[o]ne returns different, to a different place, misled by the belief that neither has changed. Yet I am grateful for the shocks. The conditioning process which turns live tissue into fossil is arrested by the earthquake. Even buried strata may be exposed" (190). In Page's travel encounters, there is a re-articulation of the positioning of the self in relation to its surroundings, and it is through it that Page tries to make sense of cultural difference. Instead of distancing observer and observed, there is a turn to the self and to its relations with the new and unexpected other.

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[9] In her memoir *Hand Luggage*, Page also writes about her time in Australia: "And then, port deprived, we were there, / though, having arrived, 'There' was 'Here', in a flash. / Astonishing, that. The centre is you. / Or so I thought then" (27). Such passage is also particularly significant considering Page's later reflections on the relations between travel and subjectivity.

[10] For another discussion on Page and the idea of cultural shock, see also Bhelande 38-39.

It is also interesting to notice that, in "Questions and Images" (as the first essay about her travel experiences in the Americas), Page decides to focus more on the kinds of changes each country brings to her self than on each country's differences. As a result of her recognition that the cultural shocks she experiences reveal her own cultural bias, Page acquires a new awareness about subjectivity, and it is this process she seems to be interested in representing in her essay. According to Freake, through the identity changes Page undergoes when living abroad, she recognizes the many layers involved in perspective. For him, this recognition becomes clearer when, in her essay, Page compares her own subjectivity to the small pictures she would find, as a child, in popcorn packages. Page tells us that these pictures would come with red and green celluloid filters which would make parts of the picture disappear. For Freake, these pictures suggested to Page the "tyranny of subjectivity," since "it allows only partial glimpses of reality" (Freake 95). With such a realization, Page's "primary concern is to remove the filters" (Page "Questions" 191), leading her to a new kind of search: a search for the roles of her multifaceted self in her art of representation.

In "Canadian Women's Autobiography," Helen Buss discusses the role of travel writing as a beneficial medium for autobiography (155). Recalling Margaret Laurence's views on travelling, Buss writes, "Laurence observed about traveling that the real stranger one is likely to meet is oneself" (155). For Buss, then, "[t]ravel accounts offer the opportunity to explore oneself indirectly while exploring the culture one is encountering" (155). Yet, embedded in this exploration of both self and other in travel there is the recognition that, in placing or locating the self, the other is also located or re-discovered. Caren Kaplan, for instance, argues that "in the ideology of subjectivity, distance is the best perspective on and route toward knowledge of self and others" ("Transporting" 212). In "Transporting the Subject: Technologies of Mobility and Location in an Era of Globalization," Kaplan is particularly interested in discussing what she calls the "locatedness" in travel (or the points of origin or connection of the subject), particularly in the globalized world (209).[11] Even if not necessarily focusing on the kinds of dislocation described in travel accounts, Kaplan's emphasis on the representation or grounding of subjectivity in travel becomes very significant since related to questions of power and affirmation, and serves as a very useful counterpoint for the idea of travelling as enabling the "re-discovery" of subjectivity. Though leading the traveller back to his or her own self, the travel discourse inevitably reads and marks its others, re-mapping as well the boundaries that delimit the spaces occupied in the encounter. In this context, travel is located not as much as "celebration" of the crossing of frontiers but also as ambivalent and "tainted" (Clifford, *Routes* 39) in its core.

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[11] In this particular essay, Kaplan focuses on how, even in the cybernetic discourse of displacement and disembodiment, the self is inevitably located. One of her main points is to discuss how the discourse of technology and communication, even if claiming the deconstruction of the binary between mobility and location, "animates the question of embodiment in historically specific ways" (219).

It is exactly this ambiguity of travel and its complexities that I explore in Page's cultural encounters. Following Sandra Almeida's suggestion that Page's particular position in Brazil is contradictory and ambiguous ("Brasil" 116), I attempt to read such moments of ambivalence in relation to her own poetics. More than looking at travel as only a celebration of the re-discovery of the self, or as a pure attempt of the self to "master" or "conquer" the cultural other through representation, Page's writing, particularly her writing on Brazil, allows one to reflect on her multifaceted subjectivity and the role it plays in her writing. Thus, following Page's suggestion as well, my main interest is to remove some of the filters enveloping her writing on the cultural other, especially in *Brazilian Journal*. Published almost twenty years after the publication of "Questions and Images," Page's journal shows how her process of recognition took place. Although it is a very distinct piece of writing when compared to Page's other works, the journal allows us to see the particularities of the inquiries she raised in "Questions and Images." Thus, my main focus in the next section is to analyze some of the dilemmas and destabilizations of meanings Page has to face in her cultural encounters in South-America.

P.K. Page's Brazil: "this beautiful, tropical, golden dream"

Retelling it now, I wonder about describing someone else's world – seeing with a so-called fresh eye the sights and sounds and structures of another's culture. Is it not the height of impertinence to tell oneself that one is objective? When one's head is full of invisible assumptions and prejudice what conceivable objectivity can be achieved?
"Australian Journal," P.K. Page

Brazilian Journal, the book in which P. K. Page narrates her experiences in Brazil between the years of 1957 and 1959, was published for the first time in 1987, almost thirty years after her return from there. Despite being an account of her travels in a "diary-format," Page's book cannot be simply described as a travel journal, since its narrative is constituted of as many layers as the roles Page herself performs during her time in Brazil. Through the many entries of her journal, one has access to varied pieces of information: from Page's daily life as an ambassador's wife in a South American country, to her travel explorations in a new and unexpected land, or even to her experimentations with drawing and painting. More than a confidential account of specific details of her private life, the journal can be seen as an attempt to order some of her travel experiences into words, not an easy process for Page, especially considering that many aspects of her "Brazilian life" were not easily translated into English. As briefly debated above, in Brazil, Page had to learn how to live in a new and different culture. In such a context, her journal becomes one of the spaces where she conveys some of her questionings in relation to travelling and encountering difference.

At the time of its publication, *Brazilian Journal* caught the critics' attention for its unique format and narrative style and was the focus of varying types of reviews. Despite winning the 1987 B.C. Book Prize Hubert Evans Award and being a finalist for the 1987

Governor General's Award for Non-Fiction, the book caused controversy, particularly in relation to its format. On the one hand, Page's accounts on her development as a visual artist were the most praised aspects of the journal. Andrew Ruby, for example, in his review of Page's book, praised it for being "an artist's sketch-book: a richly jumbled amalgam that delineates its subject from myriad vantage points" (qtd. in Whitmore 214). On the other hand, the book was negatively criticized for purporting to be a journal about Page's life in Brazil but not really providing much personal information about the author's private life, thus leading to a certain ambiguity about its genre. Ken Adachi argued that *Brazilian Journal* was an "odd hybrid – part travel writing, part poet's reaction to sensory impressions, part a wry anecdotal account of the unceasing social duties and obligations of an ambassador's wife" (M4). For Adachi, since Page decided to keep her personal life completely hidden in the narrative of the journal, the book had "the effect of a withheld autobiography" (M4). Barbara Wade Rose would also criticize the fact that Page's book "hangs somewhat unsatisfactorily between journal and journalism" (30). Nevertheless, despite the controversies about genre and narrative style, for critics such as Cynthia Messenger, *Brazilian Journal* should not be approached as a simple "diary." In her review of Page's book, Messenger states that "Page is not confiding in a diary; rather, she records a more significant intimacy in the observations of her extraordinary eye" ("Review" 161). This way, the critic prefers to focus more on Page's use of images and descriptions of her relationship with the new land, than on her "private thoughts" ("Review" 161).

It is in this line of thought that *Brazilian Journal* is approached in this chapter. Instead of looking at it as only a description of Page's "most private moments," it is seen as a layered narrative, in which Page reconstructs and recreates the experiences she lived and the images she saw during her two-year stay in Brazil during the 1950s. Commenting on the reviews her book got, and on the argument that she did not provide enough personal information, Page tries to reinforce the idea that her book is more about her other than about herself. For her, it is not "a personal journal. [. . .] It's not really about me, but about the people and the country" (qtd. in Wilson "Poet Page" F7). Yet, in her representations of the Brazilian land and its people, she inevitably has to deal with questions of perspective and subjectivity, leading her to constant modifications of her own position in relation to her surroundings. Considering the fact that Brazil is, for Page, an unexpected and "unimagined" other, one of my main interests in this section is to look at how Page approaches and deals with difference, and how she reconstructs her encounters with it through such a personal and subjective medium as her journal. Even if she tries to focus her attention and her narrative on her other, her self also gets narrated and transformed. Thus, in this section, I also debate how observation transforms Page's subjectivity.

Being the reconstruction of a personal experience (in a personal medium), Page's journal is unavoidably constructed in a subjective tone, which is actually explored from its very first pages. In what could be called the "pre-texts" that open her book (Page's "Foreword," the Brazilian map, and her "Foretaste"), Page contextualizes her narrative, exploring the importance of the "I" and of her own perspective in the experiences and explorations of "Brazil."[12] These three "pre-texts" prepare the reader to the narrative that will follow them, particularly in terms of presenting a "new other" which will be, according to Page, subjectively represented. Page seems very much concerned with introducing elements such as distance and expectation in these "pre-texts" as well. Since her experience of Brazil is a very distant one, not only in terms of time (thirty years before its publication) but also in terms of space (a South American experience), she uses her "pre-texts" to prepare the reader for their encounter with difference, with another culture, with the "new world" Brazil represents.[13]

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[12] In "O Brasil de P.K. Page: deslocamentos, olhares e viagens," Sandra Almeida also points out the elements that open Page's narrative on Brazil. According to this critic, looking at what exceeds the text per se already reveals some of the many questions which will be later discussed in Page's journal (101). In her reading, Almeida points toward the book's presentation of the Brazilian map, the dedication, the

In her "Foreword," Page acknowledges both the subjectivity of her experience and the distance between the narrative one finds in the journal and the actual experience of Brazil. In this introductory note, Page tells us that this book is not the actual journal she wrote while in Brazil, but "[i]t is based, mainly, on letters to my family and extracts from my journal, written during the privileged years" (*BJ* unpaginated). Besides distance, change is also emphasized in this pre-text, as Page argues that, in these thirty years that separate the actual experience of Brazil to the publication of her book, "language has changed; Brazil has changed; I have changed" (*BJ* unpaginated). For her, this is a narrative of the past, but even if she acknowledges change, she closes her "Foreword" saying: "for me—then—this is the way it was" (*BJ* unpaginated). With such words, Page

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bibliographical record, its preface and the epigraph (98-104). My own reading also discusses some of the elements Almeida refers to as "on the edge of the text" (104), and it acknowledges Almeida's arguments related to Page's construction of Brazil as her *own*, re-appropriating it for her aesthetic pleasure, but in my reading I also attempt to read Page's contradictions in her process of representation, which are embedded in a re-discovery of her own subjectivity.

[13] In his Introduction to *Travel Writing and Empire*, Stephen Clark comments on travel writers' strategies used to create a sense of coherence to the travelled space, since it cannot actually be "verified" by the home culture. For Clark, the "travel narrative is addressed to the home culture; by its very nature, however, that to which it refers cannot be verified, hence the ready and habitual equation of traveller and liar. This in turn requires the production of counter-balancing stratagems of sensory corroboration and complex decorums of witnessing" (1). Even if for contemporary travel writing, the idea that the 'home culture' cannot verify what has been said in the travel account could be challenged, the question of production of techniques to ground the travel experience is particularly relevant to a reading of Page's narrative, especially considering her emphasis in her own subjectivity and on her "pre-text" as grounding Brazil from her particular experience.

invites the reader to enter "a period piece" (*BJ* unpaginated), a story of the past, one to which we have access only through her memory and descriptions, through her own words and narrative of it. Moreover, pointing out the fact that her narrative is at least "twice" distanced from her audience (spatially and temporarily), Page emphasizes the "constructedness" of her work.[14]

Right after her "Foreword," but already as part of the block of text already introduced as *Brazilian Journal*, Page presents a map of the country which actually only demarcates the places she has visited while there. Considering the fact this journal is published mainly for a Canadian / North American audience, it seems that the presence of the map of Brazil opening her narrative gives some contextual reference to the readers. Also, as the map marks all places Page visited while in Brazil, it indeed gives a good idea of the extent of her travels inside the country. However, despite such a referential aspect, this map can also be looked from another perspective. Sandra Almeida has already noted that the territory Page's map is "marking" or "representing" is not the Brazil we know from other cartographic maps, but, as its own name suggests, it is marking "the Brazil of P. K. Page" ("Brasil" 99). With this re-construction of the map of Brazil, Page imprints her own version of it, marking as relevant only the places she visits. Almeida sees Page's use of the map as an act of appropriation of the other through her subjective gaze, revealing also an attempt to dominate or possess the other through her representation of it, an act not entirely different from the ones practiced by travellers from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ("Brasil" 100). Almeida is precise in pointing out Page's alarming attempt to re-map the "new territory," particularly through her "re-named" representation of it. It seems also equally important to note that in Page's re-construction of Brazil's geography the very act of trying to possess the other (through its re-naming) creates a space for questioning and doubt. Page's "impertinency" in referring to her map as "the Brazil of P. K. Page" demonstrates her awareness in relation to the limits of her own objectivity. Again, in the encounter with difference, the tensions between personal and impersonal modes of representation arise, and Page contextualizes her narrative as seen through her eyes, distancing "her Brazil" from what could be considered the "actual" or "real" Brazil." In this very act of re-mapping Brazil, Page's *position* is re-mapped as well.

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[14] See also Denise Adele Heaps's discussion of Page's "Forword" as demarcating her subjectivity and historically situatedness (Heaps 359).

The third "pre-text" that introduces Page's journal is called "Foretaste." In this part of the narrative, Page describes the time when she learns that she and her husband will have to move to Brazil, and she also describes her expectations and anxieties during their preparation for the trip. What catches one's attention in this section is Page's tone of "speculation" and "uncertainty" about Brazil and the reasons she felt disappointed when told it would be her husband's next post. Reflecting on possible reasons for her disappointment, thirty years later, Page writes:

> I find it hard now to remember why Brazil fell on my heart with so heavy a thud. Perhaps it was the memory of the Latin American diplomatic wives in Ottawa who had looked like a cross between women and precious stones; perhaps an unformulated wish for a European post after Australia; perhaps [. . .] who knows? At any rate I didn't view the prospect with particular cheer. (*BJ* 2)

Uncertainty, expectation, doubt, and even a certain prejudice about South America are some of the feelings Page describes as invading her mind at the time she finds out she has to move to Brazil. The few images Page has about the country before arriving there (such as her other references to coffee, nuts, the tropical weather, and also the possibly beautiful but impossibly huge house they were going to live in), all summed to her own doubts about the foreign language and the Brazilian people, transform Brazil into a completely unfamiliar and "uncanny" space to her. Moreover, these feelings of speculation create a space for curiosity and anticipation in relation to the narrative of her journal, leading even the reader to a feeling of re-discovery of the "unfamiliar" other.

In this context, it could definitely be said that Page's "Foreword," the map of Brazil and her "Foretaste" are preparing the ground for the narrative of her journal, written almost thirty years before. In these three "pre-texts," Page is able to introduce notions of subjectivity, distance, and uncertainty, which will also be explored during her accounts of her travel encounters. Almeida has already suggested that Page's narrative of her travel experiences in Brazil is not completely different from colonial exploration writing ("Brasil" 100).[15] As in some of these colonial texts, Page reinserts the element of surprise, of moving towards the unknown or uncanny other to catch the reader's attention and to lead the reader to believe in the narrative that will be told. Even if one focuses only on these three "pre-texts" presented at the beginning of the book, Brazil is already constructed as an "unfamiliar dream," or as a magical place (Page's space). In this space, fact and fiction are intertwined to allow the creation of what Page would later call a "surrealist world" (*BJ* 9), or what Michael Ondaatje, on the back-cover of the book, calls "another planet." Such an introduction to her journal gives it a character of adventure and creates the expectation that the narrative will be mainly about the exploration of the many exotic or completely unbelievable things Page experiences in this "new world." In fact, for Laurie Ann McNeill, "throughout her diary Page constructs Brazil as a dream-like place, a fantasy totally removed from the "reality" of her Canadian self" (67). This separation between "real" and "fictional" worlds allows Page not only to create a travel tale of re-discovery of distant surroundings, where newness is something to be encountered and explored, but also to create a space for imagination and the appeal of difference to empower her narrative.

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[15] Almeida also discusses, for example, the stereotypes Page uses or recreates, even in narratives such as her "Foretaste," for example. For Almeida, Page's narrative directly echoes Pero Vaz de Caminha's Letter and its description of fertility and beauty of the land ("Brasil" 107).

In Page's journal, the crossing from North to South America marks the transition from a "known" to an "unknown" space, and it is in this space that Page has to deal with the unexpected other, ordering and translating it into words. Thus, a great part of Page's representations of the country (particularly of the city of Rio de Janeiro, where she lived), compare and contrast it with her North American background, and convey ideas of apprehension, doubt, amazement and surprise. It is certainly inevitable to note that, especially during the first half of her narrative, Brazil is so impossibly different for Page's eyes that her descriptions of it go along the tone of her introductory notes, portraying it as a "magical space," full of images and nuances she cannot readily make sense of. Already in the second entry of her journal, for example, she asks: "How could I have imagined so surrealist and seductive a world?" (*BJ* 9). Brazil's beauty and its amazingly unusual culture and people are fascinating to Page, and the seemingly fabulous images of the "fret of tropical vegetation" ("Questions" 187) permeate the whole journal.[16]

Page's construction of Brazil as this "dream-like" place can be read through Stephen Greenblatt's debate on wonder in *Marvelous Possessions*. Although in this book Greenblatt is primarily concerned with colonial travel narratives, his discussion on the use of the "marvellous" and of "wonder" to describe difference in travel can be related to Page's descriptions of Brazil as a "surreal" and "magical" space. Analyzing the presence of the marvellous in the first European narratives about the New World, Greenblatt argues that the feeling of wonder, which is usually accompanied by surprise, desire and fear, is the classical reaction to ideas of encounter, particularly the encounter between different cultures (20). According to the author, wonder is "an almost inevitable component of the discourse of discovery, for by definition wonder is an instinctive recognition of difference [. . .] in the face of the new" (20). Page's construction of "her Brazil" as a place of wonderful re-discoveries seems to help her to create a narrative which is open to the recognition of difference, authorizing her subjective perspective on it. It also helps her to find a space for the other's newness in her imaginary, enabling even the reader to follow what could be interpreted as "unbelievable" adventures in a new land.

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[16] See also Almeida 106-108.

Moreover, Page's construction of Brazil as this "magical" place can also be seen as a strategy to deal with the anxieties of representation. In Page's statement quoted in the epigraph to this section, the poet writes: "Is it not the height of impertinence to tell oneself that one is objective? When one's head is full of invisible assumptions and prejudice what conceivable objectivity can be achieved?" ("Australian Journal" 24). With this statement Page demonstrates her awareness of the fact that, as a traveller, one does not have how to escape his or her own cultural bias. Considering the fact that Page is publishing her "Brazilian experience" thirty years after coming back from Brazil and having had the time to ponder about her own bias in subjectively representing it,[17] one may also see Page's "pre-texts" and her distancing of her narrative from the "reality" of her life or of the "real" Brazil as a strategy to deal with "an other" she portrayed through a specific frame of mind. In Page's journal, Brazil challenges the writer's power of representation since it is not easily "translatable," becoming, then, a surreal or "otherworld" space.

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[17] As her essay "Questions and Images" suggests (see previous discussion).

The idea of Page's concerns with the "unrepresentability" of Brazil has already been discussed by other critics as well. McNeill sees Page's choice of publishing a journal about her experiences in Brazil as linked to the freedom such a genre gives to the "writing" of difference. For McNeill, "[s]ince Brazil seems to defy explanation, the diary snapshots Page provides, postcards to her selves, may be the only way to write of this experience. [. . .] the diary acts as an ideal medium for recording a country and an experience that change in the instant and that resist literal transcription" (67). Indeed, in Page's portrayals of the new other, the question about the possibilities of representation accompanies her descriptions throughout the narrative of her journal. Her awareness of the limits of objectivity and the failure of her own language to communicate a different reality follow her in her narrative and the subjective tone of the diary and her telling of stories, or anecdotes on her other, seem to help her to free the narrative from the burden of untranslatability.

In this context, Page's "fictionalization" of her other seems very much attached to this idea of experiencing a place which is not easy to "translate." In "But How Do You Write a Chagall?" Cynthia Messenger argues that because Page's foreign perception of Brazil is not easily translated into words she "fictionalizes" it by the "invocation of a painting" (111). Many are the passages in Page's journal in which her descriptions of the Brazilian surroundings indeed resemble fictional portraits of her other. Brazilian nature, with its beauties and also its mysteries, recurrently figure as one of Page's favourite subjects. Throughout the book, she comments on the amazing natural scenery which surrounds their house, and as if a natural explorer, she tries to describe the newness of this "maze of tropical life" (*BJ* 33) in detail. In what she calls "notes on flora and fauna," she describes, not without surprise or speculation, everything new she is able to observe, and maybe due to her lack of words, her descriptions are usually full of imagery and curiosity. In one of her entries she confesses: "I wish I knew how to describe the vegetation [. . .]. It is so excessive" (*BJ* 15). Thus, as a way to overcome such extremes, in some of her notes Page talks about the creatures and the vegetation she encounters as if telling a fabulous tale. She depicts, for example, the amusing scene of finding Maria, their maid, "fighting" with a frog in the veranda and seeing it leaping "through the door to the sitting-room and straight onto an upholstered French chair, with all the authority of the transformed prince" (*BJ* 12), or the unforgettable experience of seeing for the first time "a Brazilian blue butterfly – as large as a flying hand" (*BJ* 12), or even "a bird like a ballerina—tiny, black, dressed in a white tutu" (*BJ* 18). These are only some examples of images she collects of the extraordinary character of the scenery around her. Yet, in Page's garden, one also finds,

> [m]armosets in the flowering jungle; bands of multi-coloured birds moving among the branches of the kapok tree outside the bedroom verandah; [. . .] Flamboyantes in flaming flower against the sky as one lay on one's back in the swimming pool. Doric palms waving green plumage, growing antlers and beads. Cerise dragon flies. ("Questions" 187)

Page's interested and amazed eyes intensely observe and try to absorb Brazil's tropical differences, which are recreated as portrayals of fabulous nature and imagination.

It is interesting to note that in one of her few Brazil poems, "Brazilian Fazenda," Page actually raises the question of the "extraordinariness" of Brazil. In reflecting on the elements perceived in a farm visited in Brazil, she also constructs an idealized and wonderful world:

> That day all the slaves were freed
> their manacles, anklets
> left on the window ledge to rust in the moist air
>
> and all the coffee ripened
> like beads on a bush or balls of fire
> as merry as Christmas
>
> and the cows all calved and the calves all lived
> such a moo. (*HR* 2: 123)

In these images, the Brazilian farm, even if bringing memories of a colonial and imperial past, is now surrounded and perceived by the "beauty" of its produce. In it, the speaker continues her appreciations:

> On the wide veranda where birds in cages
> sang among the bell flowers
> I in a bridal hammock
> white and tasselled
> whistled. (*HR* 2: 123)

In these verses, by juxtaposing the image of the caged birds to her own image in the hammock, Page seems to be also constructing an idea of "imprisonment" (already raised with the image of the slaves); but for her speaker, it is probably an imprisonment in beauty, an idea even recovered in the last stanza of the poem:

> Oh, let me come back on a day
> when nothing extraordinary happens
> so I can stare
> at the sugar-white pillars
> and black lace grills
> of this pink house. (*HR* 2: 123)

As if realizing the images that she stares at but also poetically constructs are possibly "caging" her perception since embedded in a rhetoric of "extraordinariness," her "Oh" of recognition seems to be a plea for the release from these same images.

Despite this "dreamy character" of Brazil's natural beauty, the images Page encounters in the country are also described as startling and alarming since uncannily filled with sights and sensations Page is not used to and which "are beyond [her] ability to catch" (*BJ* 9). In this uncontrollable space, every noise, every smell or flavour may bring with it pleasant or unpleasant surprises which she is not necessarily able to "explain" with words. One may note her frequent references to the noises and sensations brought by "the black tropical night" (*BJ* 10). In one of the first entries of her journal, Page describes an "eventful night when [she and her husband] were wakened by what [she] thought were pistol shots ringing out in the garden" (*BJ* 8). After some minutes of tension when both Page and her husband were trying to figure out what was happening, she tells us:

> A. reported that our personal policeman was marching imperturbably up and down the terrace. Then we heard drums and strange singing in the nearby hills and realized, with a mixture of relief and disappointment, that my pistol shots were fireworks of a *festa* [party] in the neighbouring *favela* [shanty town]. (*BJ* 8)

Comments such as this, full of sounds and mysteries of dark nights, are constantly mentioned in Page's journal since, she confesses: "how afraid we still are of the dark!" (*BJ* 9). Some other startling instances include the insect-invasion of her room (*BJ* 8), or even the mysteriously enormous but immensely empty house where they live, in which one of the staff workers sometimes feels the ghostly presence of the previous lady of the house. Despite not really believing in it, Page tells that: "occasionally, when I've been wakened by the heat and unable to sleep again because of the drums from the *favela* or the frogs or the tree-toads, I wonder if the *senhora* does walk. But I have never felt her presence. If anything, it is her absence that I feel" (*BJ* 19). With images like these, Page constructs a completely new space in which anything may happen, re-inscribing it once more as uncanny, different (not like home).

It could also be said that, in Page's narrative, the uncanny plays the part of what she sees as "uncivilized" or primitive spaces of Brazilian life, and her representations of it are "authorized" by the perception of her position in the country. Considering the fact that the axes of Page's voyage in the Americas (Canada and Brazil) are inevitably inserted in a centre / periphery dichotomy, Page's narrative still reflect a discourse of re-appropriation or re-construction of the "emptiness" (*BJ* 9) of Brazil, where she can imprint her own marks of re-discovery.[18] Her ambiguous portrayals of the Brazilian landscape reinstall a discourse in which the more "peripheral" and "exotic" other is the space where the image of "uncannyness" contrasts with her own "more civilized" background. Moreover, even if, in her writing, Page allegedly tries to describe what she "really sees," she demonstrates an ambiguous position of superiority, creating a certain distance in relation to her other. In her attempts to control and order her experience of Brazil, Page shows how eager she is to make assumptions about another culture without really trying to deeply explore its historical and cultural contexts. An interesting example is her effort to summarize what conjures up Brazil for her, even having lived only in the city of Rio de Janeiro for less than a month. For Page, Brazil is seen as:

> Immense wet heat and thousands of night insects [. . .] tremendous lengths of sand, [. . .] pedlars with eagle-shaped kites under a barrage of bright balloons on the boulevard by the sea; black-eyed children in pony carts with coloured nurses in starched white; the faded patchwork of the houses in the *favelas*; women balancing parcels on their heads; crowds at the beaches in the midday heat, minus sunglasses, minus hats, beating out samba rhythms on the blistering hot radiators of their cars… (*BJ* 15)

This "amalgamation" of images collected in the first month Page is in the new place shows how quickly her "hungry eyes" (*BJ* 73) absorb difference and try to order it in a coherent sequence of images. Through her choice of elements that "conjure up" Brazil, she reveals her foreign perspective, aesthetically "analyzing," or "looking out," and trying to stabilize the newness of the country. By coherently organizing these images she can also put herself as superior to them.[19]

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[18] See also Almeida's discussion of Page's position in Brazil as occupying what Caren Kaplan defines as the portrait of the modern traveller, who legitimates and re-confirms spaces such as "first" or "third" worlds, or developed and underdeveloped ("Brasil" 106).

Page's social and political position in the country is also an important "filter" to her views of her other. As Janet Giltrow reminds us, when Page and her husband move to Brazil, they "assume ambassadorial functions, perspectives and behaviours" (66), and it is from the ambassadorial house that they observe and view Brazil. For Giltrow, Page "moves right into the house and witnesses Brazil of the late 1950s from that standpoint – from the pink palace, from the cortege of limousines, from the platform party" (66). Giltrow's emphasis on Page's position inside the ambassadorial "palace" is indeed very important since it establishes a significant context for her relations and encounters with the other culture. Thus, Page's narrative is also informed by her diplomatic role in international relations, and by her negotiations between subjectivity and protocol, or what is expected from her and how she can experience her other. Brazil is then the location where both Page and her husband are realizing their jobs, fulfilling a commitment, and as such keeping certain behaviours.

Even if Page's functions as an ambassador's wife may not be seen as the primary focus of her narrative on Brazil, she was actually very much involved in "protocol" and even inhibited by such functions. According to Cynthia Enloe, by the end of the nineteenth century, the roles and duties of women married to diplomats became much more visible, and although "[t]hey were not on the official payroll, [. . .] they were in their government's minds" (96).[20] It is in this context that Page was inserted. Already before her experience in Brazil, Page would demonstrate her concerns about how to perform her role as an ambassador's wife. In her "Australian Journal," Page quotes a short piece of conversation she had with the wife of the Counsellor at the American Embassy in Ottawa before assuming the post in Australia. In this conversation Page asks: '"How do you do this job?" [. . .] "Or what I'm really asking is, how will I do it?" / "Make a friend of protocol," she replied, "and be yourself." / To which my mother added, "And keep your shoes on, darling, I implore you"' (6). This conversation hints at some of the roles Page has to perform as a diplomatic person. Ideas such as following protocol and never getting as comfortable as to take her shoes off demonstrate the distancing one should keep from the other's environment and culture. This is the kind of paradoxical position Page has to assume when living in Brazil. Although in some excerpts of her journal she confesses that, when dressed up to formally call on other international representatives she feels like "the whole thing is make-believe and that [she] is dressed in [her] mother's clothes" (*BJ* 29), she actually assumes her diplomatic role while living there.[21]

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[19] Note, for example, Elizabeth Bishop's first attempts to "order" her experience of Rio de Janeiro during her first days there, and how such questions relate to my previous discussion of Bishop and the impositions the traveller-tourist applies on the new land.

One of the duties Page has as an ambassador's wife is the organization of the domestic space of their life in Brazil. As Enloe's ironically reminds us, the "domestic duties of foreign-service wives include creating an atmosphere where men from different states can get to know one another 'man to man'" (97). When in Brazil, Page is embedded in a new environment and having to deal with the whole organization of the huge *palacete* where they live.[22] One notes, for example, that the first entries of her journal are replete of comments on Page's domestic environment, describing their immense house with its unending problems, her many difficulties with staff, and her concerns with language and how to perform her duties and chores in such a new place. Her domestic duties seem to overcome her sometimes, and she even comments on her journal: "What a terrible fate to have no interest or conversation other than servants" (*BJ* 17). Indeed, during the very first months in Brazil she has to deal with a house full of renovations and a staff who does not necessarily understand her. Thus, Page is completely absorbed in her domestic environment, and her journal writing focuses mainly on the difficulties and frustrations she faces. She tells us: "I spend an enormous amount of time trying to communicate with the servants and an almost equal time trying to disentangle the misunderstandings I have created" (*BJ* 13). Also, apart from frustration in communication, the whole routine of the organization of the house overcomes her, and later in her writing, she asks in great awe: "Is the house controlled by poltergeists? Keys here yesterday have vanished today, elevators mended yesterday break down today. Lights suddenly fail. And taps" (*BJ* 14). The domestic environment is once more transformed into an uncanny space, where things "go one step forward, two steps back" (*BJ* 16), and her handling of it seems completely out of control.

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[20] In *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Cynthia Enloe discusses the role of women in international activities ranging from tourism, to military, and even diplomacy. In the chapter "Diplomatic Wives," Enloe actually raises the fact that diplomats' and ambassadors' wives had a role to perform for their government, even if not necessarily officially recognized as government workers.

[21] See also Heaps 357.

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[22] *Palacete* is the diminutive word for *palácio*, or "palace." In one of the entries of her journal, Page writes about the *palacete*: "Built for de Braga, reported to be a cousin of the King of Portugal, on a dramatic site, with imported marble for the floors, imported artists to pain the ceiling, it is architecturally beautiful" (*BJ* 18). It is also interesting to note that, in her memoir *Hand Luggage*, Page comments on her "duties" in the house as well: "The inventory – heavens! – those pages of lists / of silver and crystal and china, things shipped / to furnish this residence. We were the first / Canadians in it. The job fell on us / to see that it functioned. Fruit knives and fish forks / and finger bowls – mercy! And facecloths that matched / with bath mats and towels. I counted and checked" (*HL* 54).

Besides frustration and disappointment, Page also uses irony to describe her concerns about communicating with the house workers and about her ability to deal with people from different backgrounds, both culturally and economically. Many are the instances in which she humorously describes her interactions with the workers, such as the following:

> One black-skinned boy we employed as a cleaner was so affected by my difficulties with Portuguese that he became totally mute—able only to point and gesticulate. The first day that he actually *did* understand something I said, he underwent a vocal catharsis—releasing a great flood of mellifluous speech. This was accompanied by a kind of ballet in which he mimed—of all things—his love for the Canadian flag! (*BJ* 16)

As in the description above, her workers are usually caricaturized and their interactions are satirized. Although such ironic portrayals may be seen as attempts to show the "comic" aspect of Page's misunderstandings in communicating with Brazilians, it also shows her ambiguities in relation to her understanding of her other, since her representations are embedded in frustration and in an appalling sense of superiority as well. One of the most disturbing descriptions Page writes about house workers is the narrative of her reasons for firing the laundress. In Page's words:

> Hated doing it but she was not a very good laundress and eighteen sugar bananas and five kilos of beef unaccountably disappeared on Saturday. Unfairly, perhaps, I suspect her. Yet I am sorry to see her go. It is unlikely I shall ever again employ a grotesque: elephantiasis of the legs and breasts and a strange little beard which hangs straight down under her chin and curls at the end. In a book I was reading

> the other day, the author said Baudelaire was the poet of the Brazilian jungle [. . .] and certainly Lourdes, for that is her name, is pure Baudelaire. Ready for the clothes-line, her great brown arms full of white sheets, rows of clothes pegs clipped to her dress like rows of nipples on some gargantuan sow, she was a truly awesome figure. (*BJ* 14)

With such a portrait, Page again constructs a surreal imagery to represent difference and difficulty in dealing with the other. In her narrative, especially in the first half of it, Page usually describes the people around her in such terms as grotesques and unimaginable, and in doing so she inevitably reconstructs a discourse of civilization and barbarism, in which the barbarous Brazilian workers could be even described as a "house full of monkeys" (*BJ* 17).[23] In her interview to Anjali Bhelande, Page responds to her own comment on the house-workers saying, "I am astonished I wrote that. I suppose it could be read as a pejorative remark. I cannot believe that I thought of it that way. As children we were frequently referred to as monkeys – meaning active and all over the place and beyond communication. And that is what I felt" (*BJ* 40). Yet, even if she did not mean to be stereotypical or pejorative, the image of the "uncivilized," not-well behaved, and childish other is used throughout Page's narrative and is actually explored in Page's poetry as well.

In "Brazilian House," the frustration with the emptiness of the house she lives in and with her relations with the Brazilian workers appears as the main element defining her feelings towards her surrounding. The poem opens with the sense of estrangement the house itself brings to her:

> In this great house white

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[23] See also Almeida 113-114.

as a public urinal
I pass my echoing days.
Only the elephant ear leaves
listen outside my window
to the tap of my heels. (*HR* 2: 120)

Through these images, isolation and loneliness permeate the reading of the space, which is both cold as "a public urinal" and extravagant such as the "elephant ear leaves" of the outdoor garden. Yet, even in isolation, the house is not completely empty:

Downstairs the laundress
with elephantiasis
sings like an angel
her brown wrists cuffed with suds
and the skinny little black girl
polishing silver laughs to see
her face appear in a tray. (*HR* 2: 120)

In Page's re-reading of the house workers, she seems more interested in looking at their social roles in the house, and through the juxtaposition of different images, she "characterizes" their positions there. This way, the sick laundress is not only looked through her deformed body anymore, but through the suds that cuff her wrists, and mark her place in the house. Similarly, the laughing of the girl who polishes the silver tray reveals more than a simple joke or apparently "foolishness," since it could be approached as implicitly dealing with the economic system that positions this girl as part of the properties of the *palacete*. Finally, the last stanza of the poem reads:

Ricardo, stealthy
lowers his sweating body
into the stream
my car will cross when I
forced by the white porcelain
yammering silence drive
into the hot gold gong
of noonday. (*HR* 2: 120)

In direct contrast to the workers in the house, the speaker, as the "master," is able to leave it, even if for a few hours. Her car crosses over the stream where the sweaty worker is probably going to alleviate his body from the hot sun, and she leaves the house behind towards the golden day. Through such contrasting images, Page re-creates the domestic space as definitely marked by both her relations with the servers and also her relations with her diplomatic duties. Despite an attempted re-reading of such relations in the context of their economic or social backgrounds, they are not directly faced, since, attracted by the beauty outside, the speaker leaves them behind.[24]

It is also significant to note that Page presents other "foreign" images of Brazil throughout the journal. In Page's descriptions of her protocol visits to the ambassador's wives, one can see how Brazil is constructed from the point of view of an international political elite. After her first visits, Page writes, "everyone who has been here a day longer than I is full of advice" (*BJ* 35) as if without a more "experienced" opinion about the country she would not be able to "survive" in it. With these pieces of advice, one perceives the general picture being constructed about Brazil: for the ambassadorial community, Brazil is a beautiful country but still very problematic and very unsafe. For "Mrs. Argentina" (as Page calls one of these diplomatic wives), Brazil is the "hardest post—partly due to climate and partly because she cannot get good servants," and her practical advice to Page is "to have [her] ice made from bottled water, which freezes white; that way you know at a glance if it is safe" (*BJ* 32). For "Mrs. Israel," life in Rio was "difficult at first, but [. . .] after nine months, she finds it easier" (*BJ* 34), a comment to which Page adds, "Like a pregnancy?" (*BJ* 34). Even the expression of what is supposed to be some "positive" qualities of Brazilian people is described through a very biased point of view. For "Mrs. Swiss," it is not difficult to make Brazilian friends "if you let them know you like them" (*BJ* 35), a comment that matches Princess Czartoryska's opinion, since she "adores Brazil" and tells Page that Brazilian people "open under your approval, like children" (*BJ* 35). In reading comments like these, it is not hard to recognize the construction of Brazil as an uncivilized space, where people are not well-educated or are too naïve to be considered on the "same level." It is in such a contextual framework that Page starts experiencing Brazil, and although this is not an "excuse" for some of Page's pejorative and ambiguous comments on Brazil and its people, at the beginning of her stay there she inevitably approaches the country from a very careful and distancing position.

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[24] Almeida's discussion of Page's description of the people around her is also very interesting since focusing on the question of race and on Page's insistence in representing their skin colour, as if a sign of recognition of her cultural background ("Brasil" 115). See also Page's comments on this issue in *Hand Luggage*, 61.

Yet, one may notice that, differently from some of her fellow ambassador's wives (in particular some who actually never get really involved with the country's life and its people), Page feels compelled to learn about the country and to experience it by herself.

In some of her descriptions of her trips and adventures in the city, and also of her interactions with the Brazilian community, one perceives that she gets more and more interested in Brazil. She admires the country's beauty, its customs, and habits and feels that it is indeed an incredible experience to face cultural elements that one does not have any idea about. She describes, for example, that it is "[m]arvellous to be confronted by fruits you know nothing about—taste, texture, whether they have stones or small seeds, are soft or hard" (*BJ* 43). Page's experience of Brazilian cultural elements leads her to destabilization and revision, and after four months in Brazil, she questions herself: "Disturbed and excited about Brazil. Why? What is it all about? Does place alter person? It's like falling in love—with the country itself" (*BJ* 46). Page's experience in Brazil does change her, and despite so many concerns raised by her fellow ambassadorial acquaintances, Brazil provides Page with such extraordinary beauty and imagery that leads her to "fall in love" with it, with an exuberance she had never felt before: "This seems to me what life *should* be like and as if something in me has always known it—just as one knows, before one has ever been in love, what love is like" (*BJ* 68). Also, what at the beginning of her narrative she calls the "maze of tropical life and its complications" (*BJ* 33) little by little transforms her into a divided subject, who, more than actually feeling able to impose her own meanings over the Brazilian other, questions her background values, leading her to ask: "What is this revulsion in me against all the values I was brought up to respect?" (*BJ* 65). Her encounters with a different set of values and with a different way of life lead her to change and transformation, not only aesthetically, but subjectively. Not much later in her journal, Page also admits:

> The house continues on its immensely complicated course. [. . .] But for all that, I adore it here [. . .] I am one of the few diplomat wives who do. Most get swamped with the problems. Heaven knows, I do too, but some indefinable element in the air gives me a happiness I have never known before. (*BJ* 68)

Page's admiration for the country and her experiences there challenge some of her pre-established concepts and, as she writes, every "week that comes" (as Brazilians would say) brings "a hundred indecisions [. . .] and a hundred visions and revisions" (*BJ* 213).

The representation of this "indefinable element" that leads Page to a new state of happiness is not unproblematic, though. Even demonstrating her love and admiration for the country, she continually portrays it through the discourse of a wonder world. It seems that the kind of interest she demonstrates in Brazil and the love she feels towards it is more related to the kind of images the country provides her with than with a commitment to fully understand her other. Page admires the beauty of Brazil, but its seemingly fabulous images are contrasted to perplexing situations involving Brazilian people and their lives. She describes such instances with a similar aesthetical wonder, demonstrating she is not necessarily engaged in fully comprehending Brazil's social or historical conditions. One notes the lack of political commentary as well, particularly in her descriptions of disturbing social situations as her experience of observing the organization of a *favela* in Rio. Narrating the episode, Page writes,

> We drove today up over the hills and through a *favela*, which should make any sensitive, decent person devote his life to social reform, but I'm afraid my initial reaction was one of fierce pleasure in its beauty. Turning a corner we saw a group of vividly dressed people standing against a great fortress of square gasoline tins

> painted every conceivable colour. Water, of course. And socially distressing. But my eye operates separately from my heart or head—or at least in advance of them—and I saw, first, the beauty. (*BJ* 70)

As if more interested in getting the different "aesthetical material" these new surroundings would offer her, Page does not engage in a debate about her other's social and economic conditions. The fabulous and wonderful colours and patterns the *favela* offers her become priority in her narrative, and it seems that it is through the "aestheticization" of difference that she finds a strategy to deal with the newness of some particularities of Brazilian life.[25]

Because of images like these, critics such as Denise Adele Heaps, define Page's look at Brazil as a "voyeuristic experience" (357). According to Heaps, the aesthetic nature of Page's images and the lack of a deeper political commitment and social commentary are "disconcerting" and "distancing features," which "buttress the impression that Page was somnambulant in the political and socioeconomic sphere of Brazil" (357). Moreover, for Heaps, "Page's tendency to aestheticize has an anaesthetizing effect" (358), and it impedes her to deeply experience Brazil as whole. In the same line of thought, Sandra Almeida argues that despite Page's claims that she adores Brazil, she constantly demonstrates a certain distancing from Brazilian culture itself, maintaining a position of superiority in relation to the country and its people (114). Such paradoxical positions are read by Almeida as characteristic of travel narratives, and in Page's account, her "eyes" transform everything they see in beauty, revealing a problematic idealized view of the Brazilian other (108-109).

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[25] In her interview with P.K. Page, Anjali Bhelande asks the poet about the critical commentary that she focuses more on nature than on the social problems of Brazil, to which the poet responds: "As for the poor people of Brazil, I don't think I knew their experience very well. Talk about appropriation of voice [. . .] I don't think you have to write about everything" (39). Yet, in *Hand Luggage*, maybe as a certain "correction" of previous descriptions of Brazil, Page brings up the social commentary: "To forget / certain things is impossible, even today, / some fifty years later – *favelas* – in fact. / A congenital blindness afflicted the rich. / Those born to the purple had dye in their eye, / or so I concluded. How otherwise could / they have lived with the poor in their faces and paid / so little attention?" (55). Page does seem interested in paying attention to them; but as in "Brazilian House," where she rushes outside leaving the house and the workers behind, in *Hand Luggage*, after the social commentary, she writes: "Back to beauty" (55). Once more the natural beauty of Brazil overcomes her attention.

Both Heaps and Almeida are very precise in their argumentation about Page's writing. Page's portrayals of her other can definitely be read as attempts of the writer to use the other's differences to her own aesthetical interests. It is also significant to note, though, that it is exactly through these representations of Brazilian difference as inserted in the discourse of "wonder" that one can perceive the moments of destabilization of meaning in Page's encounters with the other. Heaps argues that "travel writing tells us as much if not more about the author as the place" (356), and that "place becomes an extension of the self, and the numerous autobiographical subject positions of that self, such as one's gender, historical context, [and so on]" (356). Following this line of thinking, one may say that Page's constructions of Brazil show as much about her self as about her other's space. In her narrative, she portrays her own anxieties in realizing that, in the collision between past knowledge and the experience of the baffling other, there is a loss of certainties that challenges her position as a writer (or translator) of the other's culture. Thus, in Page's writing of Brazil, she reveals the negotiations involved in her portrayal of the relations between observer and observed.

Travel is not an unproblematic or transparent medium, not even for the traveller, and, as Brian Musgrove reminds us, "the travel text is also a site of distress and unraveling" (31). Such characteristic of the travel text permeates the whole narrative of *Brazilian Journal*, and throughout her writing Page demonstrates her awareness of the tainted character of the acts of travelling and writing about the other. Page's portrayals of Brazil are usually interwoven with her debates on subjectivity and how this subjectivity shapes and confines Brazil inside Page's own cultural bias. Thus, through her writing of her experiences in the new land, she recognizes that, as a traveller, she inevitably modifies her other through her own subjective perspective, but, at the same time, she is also modified by it. Her poem "Travellers' Palm" (from which she takes the last stanza to serve as an epigraph to her journal), seems to illustrate this double character of travelling. The poem reads:

> Miraculously plaited tree.
> A sailor's knot
> rooted,
> a growing fan
> whose grooved and slanted branches
> are aqueducts
> end-stopped
> for tropical rains.
>
> Knot, fan,
> Quixote's windmill,
> what-you-will—
> for me, traveller,
> a well.

On a hot day I took
a sharp and pointed knife,
plunged,
and water gushed
to my cupped mouth

old water
tasting green,
of vegetation and dust,
old water, warm as tears.

And in that tasting,
taster, water, air,
in temperature identical
were so
intricately merged
a fabulous foreign bird
flew silent from a void

lodged in my boughs. (*HR* 1: 157)

As the traveller, who cuts the tree and drinks its water, interfering and even destroying her other, Page's pen, and her words, also "cut" a reality around her, interfering in her surroundings and moulding it (using it) to her own purposes. Instead of reading it as only an ode to the merging between traveller and the other (as it has been read in criticism), one may also see it as Page's awareness that for such a merging there is the "destruction" of it as well.[26] This palm's water tastes like "old water, warm as tears," revealing the implications of external transformations of its natural world. Also, the foreign bird flies and lodges in the speaker's "boughs," which seems quite significant since it is after the encounter with the other that the speaker appears to become "rooted" as well. In this sense, the bird could be figuratively read as a re-discovery of the speaker's self, also foreign to her, which she finds in the supposedly "estrangement" of a different world. Through this encounter, her other destabilizes her, shakes her deep structure, leading her to a new awareness regarding her own subjectivity.[27]

This image of transformation is a constant feature of *Brazilian Journal*, and in some of her entries, Page also presents descriptions of the transformation of trees that are actually very similar to the imagery of "Traveller's Palm." More than once Page describes her amazement in looking at trees that are becoming different and growing "alien" elements on them. In one of the passages, she describes: "Every palm tree pushes an enormous flower like a tropical bird out through its tightly plaited leaf-stalks. The travellers' palm has a flower almost as large as mine. (Interesting confusion! Do I really think of my head as a flower? But why not?)" (*BJ* 77). In Page's confusion between the observer's head and the observed nature there seems to be an interlocking of subject and object of representation. At another moment there is again the reference to the palms growing "alien" elements:

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[26] Almeida, for example, argues that this poem suggests the idealized and perfect merging between the traveller and the travelled space, since the natural world, represented by the tree, is constructed as "generous" and as a space to which the poet identifies herself ("Brasil" 103-104). Though I agree with Almeida that Page does use such images in her poem, it seems to me that the poet also opens a space for the challenging of these exact impositions of the traveller over the travelled space.

[27] Denise Heaps also reads the image of the foreign bird as a recognition of another part of the speaker's self (364). Yet, as I will discuss later, her reading is related to the discovery of visual art.

> "Must write about the palms. Each palm at this season, regardless of its type, has grown a pair of antlers—one on either side of its trunk, and high up. [. . .] all the trees are turning into stags. [. . .] The traveller's palm, however, which grows like a huge fan, squeezes an immense crested bird's head of purple and white out from between its ribs." (*BJ* 166)

Page's imagery in relation to transformation and the growing of different (or even alien) elements that modify the tree's "identity" shows how Page's observing eyes seem very much attentive to the possibilities of change. As the traveller's palm that grows a "bird's head between its ribs," Page also discovers a new set of "alien" elements departing from her, revealing some hidden aspects of her subjectivity. It is as if she recognizes there is something new in her way of seeing or perceiving the world outside the self.

In fact, Heaps contends that Page's experience of Brazil "irrevocably transforms her" due to the cultural shock it provokes (359). For Heaps, Page's transformation is related to the discovery of a new medium of expression since, upon her arrival in Brazil, "she lost her access to the symbolic system of poetry, yet gained instead access to what was for her a new and different symbolic system – that of visual art" (359). Drawing and painting seem to come to Page from her inability to communicate in the foreign language Brazil as a whole represents to her. Through drawing, Page makes "the culturally unintelligible intelligible – making the nondiscursive discursive by engaging in visual semiotic utterance" (Heaps 365). Thus, the void Brazil represents to Page (particularly in terms of her lack of words to represent it) is filled by her turn to drawing and painting.

Heaps also uses Page's epigraph from "Traveller's Palm" to talk about this transformation, arguing that the "fabulous foreign bird" mentioned in the poem can be interpreted as "the language of visual art" and "Page's Brazilian self who learns that language" (364). For Heaps, then, Page's greatest transformation in Brazil is related to her change of artistic mediums.[28]

The poet's turn to visual art is indeed a very significant aspect of her experience in Brazil. In *Hand Luggage*, Page describes it:

> I was happy enough. Ecstatic at times,
> but my pen wouldn't write. It didn't have words.
> (No English vocabulary worked for Brazil.)
> I stared at blank paper, blank paper stared back.
> Then, as if in a dream, the nib started to draw.
> It drew what I saw. It was fearless – a child
> approaching a fire not knowing it's hot
> yet not being burned – a miraculous child. (*HL* 59)

As these verses demonstrate, drawing comes as a certain relief or salvation for the poetical mind. In this context, Page's turn to visual art can also be seen as a part of her process of destabilization as a writer of the other, since she has to deal once more with questions of cultural representation (significantly noted in her awareness that her English words did not work for Brazil). Visual art offers Page a more literal means of expression, one through which she would be able to diminish her anxieties of trying to find a balance between experience and representation. In "Questions and Images," she says: "I drew as if my life depended on it – each tile of each house, each leaf of each tree [. . .]. And in drawing them all I seemed to make them mine, or make peace with them or them with me" (365). Drawing and painting become, for Page, ways to continue her experiments with a more literal (or objective) world she could actually not recreate in writing anymore, as Brazil defied linguistic ordering or translation. However, even through drawing, the idea of a complete possession or comprehension of the other is frustrated, since representation is always a particular and localized experience. The literalness Page tries to reach in painting or, as Almeida suggests, the aesthetic "re-possession" of Brazil (110), seems to show the poet's very dependence on what she sees around her. Describing an episode when she is in the countryside painting with her husband, she says: "As I've noticed before, he is not the slave that I am. Before a canvas, he is God" (*BJ* 205). Seeing herself as a "slave" of her surroundings, Page feels destabilized by her other, as she does not really control it, but is controlled or even overcome by it. In this context, if Brazil offers her the beauty and the colours she seeks to "aestheticize" and order experience, it also defies these same attempts, since leading the writer-painter-observer back to her own means of representation.

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[28] Almeida also argues that the space Brazil represents for Page becomes a place of transformation for the artistic subject ("Brasil" 108-109).

In this context, *Brazilian Journal*, as a subjective account of Page's experience in the completely different and unexpected space Brazil opened to her, is not simply a narrative in which one finds the image of the privileged traveller transparently writing her other. In Page's journal, one also finds the picture of a divided subject constantly struggling with the destabilizations brought by the experience of difference and uncertainty. In her journal, as Heaps suggests, Page "raises questions [. . .] about the interconnectedness of language and identity" (355), to which one could add that she also reflects on the role of subjectivity in travel and the production of cultural translations. One notes, for example, that Page is constantly asking herself how to write about the different colours, textures, and shapes she encounters. The anxieties and questioning involved in writing and representing the other are some of the major destabilizations she undergoes in travel.

One of the episodes in her journal that seems to translate her questioning over representation is her description of the process of preparing a speech to be presented at the Brazilian Academy of Letters in 1958. This speech is probably the first time she has to speak in public to a Brazilian audience, particularly one that is constituted of other writers. Besides the anxieties of having to write a speech after not having formally written for a long time, Page describes how her speech was put together:

> Eventually, [. . .] I wrote two small nature poems in Portuguese and then the whole speech began to move – an account of the places we have visited in Brazil, as described by their poets. With the help of A.'s editorial skills and a translator who was able to provide me with Portuguese words I could pronounce, I finally had something that was usable: my discovery of their Brazil. It was to end with me addressing the academicians directly, with a quote from Gonçalves Dias: 'Meninos, eu vi.' ('Little boys, I've seen it myself.'). (*BJ* 149)

Although the speech itself is not included in the journal, Page's narrative of the episode reveals the many layers of cultural presentations and translations involved in the production of a text which, once again, intertwines experience and representation. In such an unsettling moment, being transformed by the use of another language, the text she produces contains an account of places she saw, but they are not represented or described only by her, but also by Brazilian writers who had previously written about it. In this narrative, Page is able to talk about places she sees in Brazil, but at the same time it is clear she does not posses their meanings since they are given to her by her readings of their writers. She discovers these places, but they are not necessarily her *possessions*. The pronouns *my* and *their*, which she uses to talk about her/their Brazil, do not necessarily establish a relationship of her own possession of the other (as Almeida suggests).[29] On the contrary, she possesses the act of discovering a country, at which she gazes, but which escapes her when she tries to represent it since not easily translated to her own linguistic codes.

In Page's travel encounters, she recognizes that her old modes of representation were fallible. In "Questions and Images" she writes: "in a sudden and momentary bouleversement, I realize that I have been upside down in life - like a tree on its head, roots exposed in the air" (191). The kind of recognition or re-discovery Page undergoes in Brazil actually leads her to question the modes of representation which are produced through a split subjectivity. Following Brian Musgrove's idea that the act of looking at the unsettled subject "in the movement from 'seeing' to 'knowing'" may offer an alternative reading to travel texts (44), it seems that Page's unsettlement offers an opportunity to see how, through the destabilization of knowledge, she is able to reconsider her own process of writing and representation. Moreover, in Page's narrative one perceives a clear tension between ambivalent forces that inform the position of the traveller. She is constantly struggling between the position of the "self-assured re-discoverer" (who marvels at the encounter with difference) and the "destabilized traveler" (who is not able to make complete sense of her travel experiences). These two ambiguous positions are not easily reconciled in her text. Yet, reading Page's journal from this ambivalent perspective allows us to see how she tries to deal with the burdens of representing an experience that "exists only in [her] memories and no words can recreate" (*BJ* 241).[30]

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[29] See Almeida "Brasil" 107-108.

The Luring of Beauty and the Re-discovery of a Personal Poetics

In one of her entries called "Nature notes" in *Brazilian Journal*, Page describes her observations of "a spider with a golden web" (*BJ* 52). This was something very intriguing to the poet, who carefully considers her observations:

> I would have thought it a trick of light except that, no matter what the light, the gold was unchanging, and on the spider's abdomen was a clot of golden thread [. . .]. I had believed, without knowing much about spiders, that they spin webs as invisible as possible in order to deceive insects into thinking they are flying through air. If that is so, then what is this spider up to? [. . .] Does it eat only those it can lure by beauty? (*BJ* 52)

In her reading of the natural world surrounding her, Page reveals something very significant about her own poetics: lured by beauty, she, as the fly in her poem "Fly: on Webs," moves straight to the golden one.[31] Brazil, to Page, represented this golden beauty (and she indeed uses the word gold to define it many times). She cannot resist it, and despite not being able to poetically describe it (apart from her sketched portraits in her journal), she does take Brazil deep into her poetical imagination: one could even say it leads her to her inner or subjective eye.

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[30] This quotation was also used in Almeida 116.

[31] "Fly: on Webs" was used as the epigraph for this present chapter.

Though attempting to write more impersonal or objective poetry in her first years as a writer, Page was always interested in perspective, or in seeing something outside the self. Yet, as pointed out in my discussion of her poem "Stories of Snow," she was also interested in the idea of complement, or the relations between self and other. In Brazil, Page is faced with a completely different other she does not necessarily have the means to poetically create, and this "other," this "beautiful golden dream" leads her back to question her own poetics: impersonality or an attempted objectivity is not enough to the kind of representational challenge Brazil opens to her - language fails. Brazil becomes, then, a "door" into her poetical imagination. Unable to represent her "outer" world, she moves to her "inner" self. Even if later Page argues that "Brazil" would probably happen wherever she was, it seems that the kinds of artistic recognitions the country offered her were actually much greater than what she could have predicted or even acknowledged. The visual and external experiences become a way to experience her inner world.[32]

If a lure to the poet, natural beauty becomes the irreducible frame through which Brazil is read in Page's poetical imagination. In re-discovering herself, Page also encloses the Brazilian surroundings in a narrative of wonder, in which its surrealism constantly surprises the traveller. Even if recognizing the intricacies of her role as a traveller and explorer, Page seems to repeat the same feeling of exotic wonder other colonial travel narratives had already described to their eager readers. Her Brazil is indeed *hers*, since not necessarily the Brazil other people would encounter, experience or live in at the same time she was there. Yet, as "Fly on Webs" suggests, though "dazzling," and "struggling," the fly "drowns" and is absorbed by the luring web. In this context, even if read as the conquered space, the exuberance of the "Brazil of P.K. Page" also "conquers" her; she cannot escape it anymore. It seems this golden dream follows her throughout her poetical career, returning in moments such as in her poem "Alphabetical," in her *A Brazilian Alphabet for the Younger Reader*, and recently by occupying twenty pages of her ninety-three-page memoir in verse (and she only lived there for two years, and never returned). As Page writes at the end of the Brazilian section in her memoir,

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[32] In *Hand Luggage*, Page writes: "I wonder today, looking back, if 'Brazil' / was destined to happen wherever I'd been" (60).

> Life erases a lot.
>
> (But I haven't forgotten.
> [. . . . .]
>   living there, I was italicized. Some
> curious alchemy altered my font.). (*HL* 70)

After crossing "her" Brazilian borders, Page is finally re-mapped. It is through a similar concern with the relations between inner and outer realms constantly re-mapping the self that I approach Jan Conn's writing in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 – "Look for me on my hand-drawn maps:" Jan Conn's Travel Encounters and Its Brazilian Connections

I am one end of a long cord
between Toronto and these endless
green plains of sugar, coffee fincas, bunches
of bananas like fleets of tiny yellow boats,
moored by fabulous purple flowers that need nothing
but a body of water stretching
thousands of miles, a compass, the will
to let everything go.
"South," Jan Conn

Intertwined in different spatial locations that are usually linked by a "long cord" of creation, Jan Conn's poetical writing can indeed be approached as the outcome of her many geographical crossings. Like Bishop and Page, Conn explores the limits imposed by spatial axes such as South and North in an attempt to re-define their meanings. As the verses that serve as an epigraph for this chapter suggest, her poetry establishes potential connections between the opposing ends of a trajectory, whether actually travelled or imaginatively journeyed. Yet, while entailing relations, her poetical writing also necessarily demarcates new boundaries in the juxtaposition of different travel experiences. To be occupying one end of a connecting cord means that, despite the "will to let everything go," subjects are also bound by particular positions they take in their physical or poetical encounters with others. Aware of such complexities, Conn offers in her poetry an opportunity to re-think what is involved in writing about the crossing and the re-mapping of boundaries between different geographical and discursive spaces.

Writing and publishing poetry since the late 1970s, Conn has already published six books of poetry, most recently *Jaguar Rain: the Margaret Mee Poems* (2006). Moreover, many of her poems have appeared in literary magazines and journals, such as

The Antigonish Review, *The Malahat Review*, *Room of One's Own*, *Books in Canada*, *Prairie Fire*, and many others, as well as in literary anthologies like *Anything is Possible*, edited by Mary di Michelle, *Celebrating Canadian Women*, edited by Greta Hoffmann Nemiroff, or *Turning Points*, edited by J. Barry, C. McClymont and G. Huser. Conn was also the recipient of the 2007 P.K. Page Founder's Award for Poetry, for "Golden," the second-prize winner of the 2003 CBC Literary Awards for Poetry, for the sequence "Amazonia;" and her third book, *South of the Tudo Bem Café*, was short-listed for the Pat Lowther Award in 1990. Thus, since the publication of her first book of poems, *Red Shoes in the Rain* (1984), Conn's writing has been gradually reaching the interest of readers and scholars in Canadian literary circles. As Stephen Scobie argues in his review of *South of the Tudo Bem Café* (1990), "Jan Conn's poems are curious and unsettling [. . .] their approach is never quite what you expect" (110). Such commentary could be easily extended to a great part of Conn's writing as a whole, being one of the main reasons for the increasing attention to her work.

One of Conn's main poetical interests lies in her reflections on travel and the representation of new or unexpected surroundings; with travel constituting indeed a great part of her writing experience. Born in Asbestos, Quebec, in 1952, Conn left her hometown in her late teens, and has already travelled to and lived in different places, not only in Canada, but around the world. Many of these experiences were enabled by writing and travel grants she has received since the beginning of her literary career, which allowed her to travel to places such as Japan, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Venezuela, and Great Britain.[1] Also, her career as a scientist has led to many of her travels. In fact, Conn is a biologist whose research focuses mainly on insect genetics. She completed her Ph.D. in 1987 at the University of Toronto (with fieldwork done in Guatemala), and conducted post-doctoral research both in Venezuela and in the United States. She currently works as a research scientist at the Wadsworth Center, New York, focusing her research on malaria mosquitoes.[2] All these connections between different spaces and disciplines actually colour her poetry as well, making it unique and a privileged location for considerations of writing and representation.

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[1] Her travel grants include: Canada Council Short Term Writing Grant: travel through Japan, 1982; Canada Council Short Term Writing Grant: travel through Brazil, 1987; Canada Council Short Term Writing Grant:

The fact she is a scientist who travels through North and South America already positions Conn in a particular relation to her surroundings. It is not unexpected, then, that critics and reviewers of her work tend to emphasize her "scientific" or "objective" perspective as affecting her writing. Scobie, for example, argues that "Conn has a scientist's precision in observation" (111), while Joanna M. Weston, in her review of Conn's *Beauties on Mad River: Selected and New Poems* (2000), affirms that "perhaps her work as a biologist makes her see life clinically" (unpaginated). Indeed, when reading Conn's poetry, one cannot help but seeing the presence of a keen observer's eye guiding her writing throughout the different landscapes she focuses on, as if attempting to clearly scrutinize or examine the underlying relations of these places with a broader historical and personal background. Yet, to summarize her work as mere empirical observations of her surroundings would be to dissociate it from the many other complex issues also embedded in her poetics. Conn's images are detailed and accurate, but also imaginatively constructed by her poetical mind. Conn herself, when reflecting on the representational

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travel to Bolivia, Chile and Venezuela, 1990; Women's Studies Program (University of Vermont): travel to London to work on Margaret Mee's archives (2000); Canada Council Senior Writing Grant: Margaret Mee Project (2001). Reference found in author's literary *curriculum vitae* (courtesy from the author).

[2] Information gathered mainly from Jan Conn's personal internet site, the Wadsworth Center internet site, and *Contemporary Authors Online*.

process in "Estrella Azul," affirms that "an accuracy in biogeographical landscape / is essential even in metaphors" (*STBC* 98), a commentary also chosen by Scobie to represent her scientific objectivity (111). Nevertheless, her poems focus not only on the *observed* landscape but also on the *observer*, on herself as a subject of travel experiences, since, in her words,

> I keep finding myself
> in dusty southern cities
> where palms – estrella *azul, palmito, fruta de oro, palma del paraíso* –
> leave off metaphors
> and become, simply, themselves [. . .] ("Estrella Azul," *STBC* 99)

In this context, one notes that her work goes much beyond the mere description of scenic observations and becomes an intermingling of interior and exterior landscapes. In her writing, Conn reinterprets how inner and outer worlds (or self and other) are directly interrelated, always interfering and constructing each other.

Reviewing *South of the Tudo Bem Café*, George Elliott Clarke argues that, although the collection "consists mainly of travel poems, it maps not so much the world as the soul" ("Poet's Corner" 55). Such commentary becomes significant to my own reading of Jan Conn's poetry since it once more reinstates the connections between personal and impersonal worlds usually re-discovered in travel. In "Mapmaking: The Poet as Travel Writer," Beatriz Badikian affirms that, in travelling through the world, the poet discovers her/his "own 'personal maps'" (73), becoming then a "travel writer of sorts" (73). Recovering Mary Morris's argument that, for women travel writers, "the inner landscape is as important as the outer" (qtd. in Badikian 73), Badikian argues that, for contemporary women writers, the dialectic between inner and outer worlds constitutes a great part of their poetical journeys since, through their travel encounters, they find ways to re-access their subjectivities (74). It is exactly this dialectic that interests me in Conn's poetry. As the landscapes represented in her writing are not only mere descriptions of scenery or of a background which surrounds the speaker/poet, one of my main concerns in this chapter is to look at how Conn's portrayal of her experiences of different landscapes serves as a path to her considerations of the many roles she plays in the interaction with her own surroundings. In her poetry, places such as Guatemala, Venezuela, and Brazil appear as travel locations or destinations, but they become more than that, since they are also spaces of re-discovery for the travelling self. Even if, by representing such spaces from an outsider's point of view they might be seen as what George Elliott Clarke also calls "mere postcard" ("Poet's Corner" 55), her poetics is never static, and Conn is actually aware of her position as a transforming agent in the crossing of borders in the Americas.

As a traveller, particularly a female traveller, Conn recognizes her restlessness. She calls herself "an insomniac" (*RSR* 23), pushing herself to the limits of what she knows as if attempting to create a new reading of herself as more than "a speck / in a corner of postcard / mountains" (*RSR* 23). It seems she wants to go further, or deeper, than the "edges" of mapped locations, and she attempts to re-inscribe her own presence in the land. Reflecting on her restlessness, in "Private Fears," she writes:

> Sitting on the long wooden dock
> with a book, beer, small yellow dish of black olives
> outside your house

> which from a distance is luminous and grey,
> I watch a pair of sting rays undulating,
> flying underwater,
> and a green filefish
> hanging motionless,
> perpendicular to the water surface.
>
> I wish I could be that perpendicular, at times,
> to the earth.
> I am all angled – elbows, scarred knees,
> Restless. (*STBC* 90)

The apparent stillness of the fish cannot be reproduced in what could be defined as Conn's "angled encounters" with her surroundings.[3] In her perspective, her elbows and knees mark points of encounter or interaction between herself and the landscape, challenging a sense of detachment between self and other, since this interaction even leaves marks on her "scarred knees." Reading her physical or spatial positions inevitably means a reading of herself, of her own body, as an agent of that position, and as she recognizes in the continuing verses of her poem:

> Here in southern Florida
> I wake up in the night
> because there is no difference
> between the temperature of my body

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[3] See also my discussion of the idea of restlessness and of Conn's "angled encounters" in this and other poems in Magali Sperling, "Jan Conn's Encounters in Brazil: An-Other Writing," *Interfaces Brasil/Canadá* 5 (2005): 97-113.

and that of the air.

The boundaries tremble. (*STBC* 90)

Inner and outer worlds are once more intertwined in Conn's poetics, creating a space for the re-mapping of poetical encounters.

Conn's redefinitions of the idea of restlessness and of her angled encounters could be read as a way she found, or better, we found, to interpret her presence in, and her negotiations with, the different landscapes she inhabits. Instead of stillness, she recognizes interaction and exchange; and more than a detached observer, she attempts to position herself as experiencing the otherness of her surroundings. It is through such recognitions that I read her writing on travel, particularly her writing on the Brazilian other – a space that becomes increasingly significant in her work. Thus, in this chapter, I examine how Conn's writing on travel is affected by her reading of restlessness, and how such reading leads her to both personal and cultural re-discoveries. Considering the fact that, in Conn's approach to travel, the body becomes the main point of interconnection between inner and outer worlds, I first look at how her re-mapping of boundaries and intersections is also inevitably a re-mapping of the self, particularly of the female self. It is only through this re-mapping that new relations between different geographical spaces are constructed. Also, considering that Brazil becomes, in her writing, a space defined against such interrelations, this chapter moves towards a reading of how this particular location is represented in Conn's poetical writing. The critical look into Conn's Brazil poems may serve as a way into her other poems on travel and cultural encounters. Although my own re-mapping of Conn's poetics of travel may not necessarily account for all the varied nuances present in her poetry, it at least sheds some light to the ways the relations between inner and outer worlds are portrayed in her writing.

"In this landscape [. . .] [t]here is nowhere to hide from yourself:" Conn's Re-discoveries of the Travelling and Gendered "I"

I am a ship in a bottle, say—
there's no telling how I fit
through the neck.
"It is a grey mist," Jan Conn

Being what Beatriz Badinkian has defined as a "travel writer of sorts" (73), Conn allows her writing to reflect not only her many moves in and out the different places she visits or inhabits, but also how the particular images used in her writing are related to her multiple self. As the image of the bottled ship portrayed in the epigraph above reminds us, even if restlessly moving throughout landscapes, the poet cannot escape the material existence of her own physical body and how it inevitably interacts with her surroundings. In this sense, the traveller's outward quest for different spaces is also informed by the traveller's personal luggage, or by the intricate web of private stories that constitute (or shape) the self. Since the publication of her first two collections of poems, *Red Shoes in the Rain* (1984) and *The Fabulous Disguise of Ourselves* (1986), Conn has reflected on what kinds of internal journeys the traveller takes (even if unwillingly) in her/his external quests for the other. In these collections, the very idea of "disguise" is emblematic since through the shifts and juxtapositions of inner and outer worlds there is a surfacing (recognition) of the many layers of subjectivity and memory usually displaced in the external or impersonal world. In such context, the poetical writing becomes a "connecting cord," (as Conn's "South" suggests), but one that actually links the "discovery" of the travelled space and the "re-discovery" of spaces left behind.

In *Red Shoes in the Rain*, the section "Japanese Journal" (based on the poet's experiences of cycling through Japan) presents Conn's first attempts to reflect on how the tensions between the observed landscape and the observer's private memories permeate her writing on travel. In some of these poems, displacement actually propels the return of past memories, even if they are tentatively put aside. In "Moonflowers," for example, not even exhaustion and a complete abandonment in a different cultural experience means the forgetting of other places or stories that continue to inform the self. In the first stanza of this poem, the speaker reveals,

> I have cycled nearly 100 miles
> today, pushing past exhaustion
> to arrive in this place
> with paper walls, sliding doors,
> woven mats for floors. (*RSR* 30)

Difference is embedded in the travelling quest. Yet, even in the external drive for the other, there is still the memory of a life left behind, and in the third and fourth stanzas the speaker actually acknowledges such memories:

> I should be asleep. my body
> is light, almost transparent.
> the bones turn softly, dream
> of waking in some other room.

> full moon outside
>
> splashes white light on the covers, my outflung arm, your absence.
>
> what are you doing tonight
>
> on the other side of the world? (*RSR* 30)

In verses such as these, the juxtaposition between travelled space and the intruding memory of an absent body located "on the other side of the world" reveals the speaker's anxiety of not being free from past experiences in the present absorption in cultural otherness, and it is exactly in this space that the past comes back with a renewed force. Instead of the celebrated "freedom" of the travelling self, Conn's poem reveals a return to one's own subjectivity.

In this re-reading of travel, private memories re-surface and are re-mapped against the travelling experience. In "Udo Beach," for example, landscape and memory intertwine, creating a new space for the stories of the past. The poem starts with the location of scenery:

> there were strawberry flowers
>
> in bloom on all the near hills,
>
> light as mist or a white calico dress.
>
> the blue-green needles of pines
>
> iridescent as hummingbird wings
>
> in the webbed light that poured
>
> off the sea. (*RSR* 26)

In the poem, there is a sense of descriptive precision, but also of a dreamy surrounding nature, which actually opens up a space for the release of internal landscapes that also inform the reading of the perceived scenery. Thus, the second and third stanzas of the poem read:

> at the gate of the garden,
> a once-familiar face, faded
> as a sepia-tone photograph.
> the brother I haven't seen
> in sixteen years. a slight limp,
> an awkward smile, the hands
> drawing image after image
> in the moist air. rust stains
> on the bleached clothes.
> an ivory amulet on a black string
> hiding a scar shaped like a fist
> or a heart.
>
> we come to a place light radiates from.
> an angel ascended from this spot
> six hundred years ago. a shrine nearby
> has fragments of the robe, a faint pink,
> that exude an odour of shells. (*RSR* 26)

Such intricacies between inner and outer worlds or the imagined connections that envelop the memory of a lost brother concretized in the landscape allow the speaker to encounter an unexpected past, maybe as foreign as the landscape being "discovered." In this journey, the visit to the angel shrine is not necessarily coincidental, and the ascension that happened six hundred years ago, happens again, as the image of the brother also "go[es] in silence" leaving the speaker with "the knowledge of the finality / of things" (*RSR* 26). In this interdependent reading, the speaker re-maps past and present experiences, creating a space for the re-discovery of the self, always constructed in relation to the memory of home, or of stories of another life, not easily forgotten or suppressed in the encounter with difference. Although in a poem such as "High Green Meadows," the speaker affirms,

> I have
> erased so much past just to stand
>
> at the edge of a cliff, hands
> clenched, wind hard at my back,
> above a vast heaving blueness
> with the horizon blotted out as a mind
> gone numb in a fog [. . .] (*RSR* 29)

the physical presence of the body, which feels the wind, and the numbness of the ocean, is also marked by previous experiences, and, even in its attempts to forget, is caught in the dialectic between inner and outer worlds.

Indeed, in Conn's representations of difference in travel, the focus is never on the other alone, but always on the interrelations between self and other, or observer and observed. In her second book, *The Fabulous Disguise of Ourselves*, these interrelations continue to be explored. The first half of the poems in this collection reflects Conn's experiences in Central America, mainly Guatemala, where, according to the commentary on the book's back cover "several of the poems were written." The evident contrasts between the places visited or travelled to and the ones left home immediately overcome the poetical imagination, and many of the poems actually dwell on an exploration of the different, and even inhospitable, landscape. Since the first poem on Guatemala, "Casa Shaw," images of cockroaches, rotting wood, mould, or of a manager who "eat[s] mangoes and watermelon / with a carved silver spoon" (*FDO* 13) invade Conn's verses and create a sense of isolation and difference that actually contrasts with the speaker's incessant attempts to "write" this place back home. "Lake Atitlán," for example, opens with the speaker's inability to accurately portray the foreign environment: "I try to describe this place to you / in letters, but I can't get it down" (*FDO* 17), and the mind of the traveller literally goes back and forth between the travelled space and the space left.

Yet, despite the alleged inability, the other does get written, as well as the position the self occupies in the travelling space. "In a Black Wind," the poem that gives its name to this first section of the book, establishes significant connections between observer and observed. In the poem, the traveller's position of detachment is challenged since she is called into action – there is no way to avoid or deny the social and political situation she is a part of. Even if the poem opens with the landscape outside the self, the focus of attention goes back to the observer's experience, positioning her in the middle of action. Thus, the first stanzas read:

> We crouch in the courtyard
> where a wind picks up
> a few last rain drops and dusty
> papaya leaves, driving them

against a white plaster wall.

This is the day of the Festival of Soldiers
and military planes fly low overhead
celebrating more than a year in power
without a successful coup. You ask me
what I'm thinking. (*FDO* 15)

In these verses, the sense of uneasiness is already present in the speaker's crouching and in the low flying of the airplanes; yet despite an attempted "objectivity" in the description of private and public spaces, there is also a demand for the speaker's perspective – for her personal thoughts. What follows is a sequence of remembered events that, once more, mark the traveller's position in the landscape. The speaker, then, 'narrates:'

Last week in Panajachel I heard
the firing squad, wanting to believe
in firecrackers.

I was in the garden. A group of children
arrived at the gate.
They told me a man was dead in the street.
On his feet are expensive shoes." (*FDO* 15)

In this scene, even if trying not to commit to any particular signification for the supposed "firecrackers" she hears, through the intervention of the children, the speaker cannot deny violence and death, and the reality that surrounds her. In this context, the children merely announce something the speaker actually witnesses around her, which is further described in the poem when she notices the dead body and the "[h]ibiscus [that] fell [. . .] onto his dark shirt and hair" (*FDO* 15) or the fact that "[s]omeone dragged him / down a dirt road by his heels" (*FDO* 15). The traveller's experience is inevitably marked by what happens around her. Through the images she witnesses, the traveller becomes then immediately implicated in this situation as well, and as the final stanzas show, there is no redemption or escape:

> I went down to clean my hands
> in the lake still black as the road
> to the north in the *Popul Vuh*
>
> or all the bars on windows
> behind which faces are peering out,
> faces that slowly flicker out,
> candles in a black wind. (*FDO* 15)

The attempted "cleansing" becomes significant in the context of the travelled space, since it does not necessarily release the speaker (traveller) from the images collected. Instead of the supposed redemption of the biblical discourse, in which the image of Pilate's "washing of hands" actually leads to a non-involvement with the death and judgement of another life, in Conn's poem, the lake water does not offer any redemption, but, in fact, it brings back images that force the speaker to look at the people around her again, such as the *Popul Vuh*,[4] or the enclosure of the bars on windows, representing the oppression of a people whose lives are not necessarily in their own control. If, for the speaker, there is also the attempt to avoid these recognitions, there is no way to avoid a feeling of responsibility for the mere act of witnessing and experiencing such "black wind."

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[4] In Conn's Notes at the end of her book she describes *Popul Vuh* as "a document of the Quiche indians containing legends, religion, history and traditions" (75).

In this context, in Conn's representations, there is always a tension between the attempt to "examine" or experience the space travelled and her own position as the examiner, as the one trying to make sense of experience, and at the same time aware of her own limitations. For the traveller, there is no easy way to come to terms with a place where, as defined in "Arriving at the End of the World with No One to Talk to," "the body outlives the soul by a decade" (*FDO* 19) since "[e]veryone steals something / from everyone else" and

> what is stolen
> is the ability
> to function without bribery
> to pay without losing,
> to shoot without dying. (*FDO* 19)

Such unexpected codes are not easily translatable, or even understandable, and in their midst the traveller confesses: "I have lost myself / in hot jungles / that multiply like bacteria / all down the coast" (*FDO* 19). These verses express a sense of anxiety, of disconnection, of a deconstruction of the fantasized idea of being able to travel to "grow up." In *The Mind of the Traveler*, Eric Leeds discusses how the trope of suffering in travel narratives is usually related to a sense of becoming wiser: "[t]he fatigues of travel, the sufferings of the journey, remain a cause and a measure of the extent to which a traveller is marked and tested by experience, becoming [. . .] 'skilled' and 'wise'" (10).

Nevertheless, Conn's speaker seems to challenge the idea of displacement as "growing up" as she acknowledges: "Now I think I have come too far for that" (*FDO* 19). Conn recognizes the ambivalent position she occupies in the encounter with the other. Her failure in comprehending meanings that, as Eva Hoffman has suggested, get "lost in translation," leads her to a sense of failure in controlling experience.[5] At the same time that this failure actually takes her back to an internal search, or to a re-reading of her subjectivity, it also encloses the other in a discourse of difference, in which the space is read as inhospitable and overwhelming. The sense of great travelling "discoveries" is then challenged, and as the speaker of "Pacayalito" recognizes:

> I want to find my way
> by the constellations and planets
> like a sailor on a long voyage
> that ends in treasure or death
> but my navigational skills are nil
> and I'm not that keen on scurvy
> or the tips of poisoned arrows
>
> so I squat in the dust
> eating oranges, white seeds
> fly out of my mouth,
> shooting stars. (*FDO* 31)

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[5] A writer also concerned with travel and displacement, Hoffman titles her book on her experience moving from Eastern Europe to Canada as *Lost in Translation*. Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: a Life in a New Language* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1989).

In these verses, Conn attempts a connection between her own experience and a tradition of travelling and exploration, a connection she further develops in later poems. Yet, recognizing her own alliances with the travelling quest, she also destabilizes it, since challenging the fantasies and the meanings of its "discoveries." Her encounters in Central America open a new route to the re-mapping of travelling and of her own position as a travelling subject, one which leads her to look at space and its landscapes as in dialogue with her own subjective experiences.

Thus, it seems particularly significant that Conn opens this second collection of poems with "While I Was Looking at the Background You Walked out of the Picture," a poem that also recovers images of travelling and exploration, but which re-connects such images to memories of her family and childhood. In this poem, Conn presents her first attempts at negotiating the meaning of travel through personal memories, recovering as well different subject positions defined against the axis of who is allowed to travel or to stay at home. Conn introduces in this poem an imaginary of foreign landscapes connected to the image of the father, who later on re-appears in her works as what could be read as an emblematic figure for the male traveller. The poem opens with a potential bridging of two different locations through the affirmation: "I've sent you a tiger" (*FDO* 11). The apparent improbability of such a statement (given that it is never mentioned in the poem if the tiger is in fact alive or only a toy) does not really disturb the significance of the act. Imaginary or not, the tiger's "fur burns intense orange" and its ears, since "filled with white hair," still "[listen] to dreams / of the rain forest: fat frogs creaking, a prey of insects crackling" (*FDO* 11). Through the tiger's image, which in later poems Conn also links with freedom, power, and the ability to thrive for itself even in the most inhospitable environments, the experience of the landscape from which it was sent also travels with it, creating the potential connection of two different spatial zones.[6] Such action could be interpreted as a re-reading of earlier scenes in the speaker's life, presented in the third and fourth stanzas of the poem, when the addressed 'you' of the poem is also defined:

> You leave me behind, always,
> coming home months later, from India,
> Africa, Colombia – with another
> smell on your skin, a suitcase
> of saris and ivory elephants for your wife,
>
> and smaller gifts for us, the daughters, growing
> like Hallowe'en pumpkins, awkward teeth
> stuck in our grins. (*FDO* 11)

In these images, the sense of separation between the male traveller and what or who is left behind (wife and daughters) is tentatively alleviated by the gifts and mementos of another world. Such world is not physically travelled but imaginatively journeyed by at least one of the daughters, even if only through the father's smells. Still, the feeling of something missing, or of an absence that is not easily fulfilled by the mementos brought home, permeates these stanzas and in the last verses of the poem, the speaker tells: "I decide to become an archaeologist, / to go where you've been / while the scent is still fresh" (*FDO* 11). At this particular moment, there is an inversion of roles. Instead of a continuous waiting, a position that, according to Mary Morris, has been the traditional position of women who, confined in their domestic roles, had "to await the coming of the stranger to town" instead of journeying or looking for it (25), the speaker acknowledges her own need to follow the dream of travel, and becomes a traveller herself, sending, through the tiger, new messages home.

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[6] An example would be "The Tigers of Paramaribo," in *What Dante Did with Loss*, 65.

Even if one does not necessarily want to look at Conn's poems as pure autobiographical reconstructions of her past and family life, it is significant that she brings to the fore her father's image when talking about the travelling quest. As a mining engineer, Conn's father travelled to many places around the world in search of areas of exploration and mining development.[7] By looking at his position as an explorer, Conn recognizes that her own experience is connected to the recovery of a personal past in which travelling and the exploration of distant lands and different surroundings defined the father's domain (his space in Conn's personal mappings). Still in the same collection, in "From a Courtyard in Guatemala I Can Almost See Rome," Conn's speaker, after reflecting about some of her experiences in the Central American country, reveals,

> I half-expect a glimpse
> of my father, who came here
> 20 years ago [. . .]
> [. . . . .]
>
> His footsteps in front of me
> like something Leakey might have unearthed,
> an *Australopithecus*, destination unknown. (*FDO* 37)

Conn's archaeological search continues: her father's footsteps mark paths already travelled and that continuously inform her own searches and discoveries. However, as these verses also suggest, Conn's explorations unearth more than a familial tie or a personal history. By digging in her father's footsteps, she also excavates the historical discourse of exploration, inevitably connected to a patriarchal logic that has defined it as a primary male domain. In this context, instead of looking at Conn's recovering of her father's quests as only the reading of a private story, her poetical representations can also be seen as a public "re-discovery" of her own body as gendered and also occupying a particular position in the historical discourse of travel and exploration.

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[7] Information found in *Contemporary Authors Online*.

Critics such as Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan argue that, for women travellers, the writing on travel experiences (and I would say that even the use of travel as a literary trope) becomes a tool or even a privileged space for the destabilization of gender roles (112). According to these critics,

> [b]y "weaving" themselves in and out of established places and social roles, women traveler-writers have fashioned a space in which to explore their own identities. They have used travel writing to liberate themselves, at least temporarily, from the constraints placed upon them by their own societies, and to find the freedom to engage in an alternative way of life. (112-113)

Through the imaginary and the actual crossing of borders, female writers find different spaces for the re-construction of their own histories and positions in identity discourses, recovering also their own roles as constructors of knowledge, even if more aware of their own limitations. Conn certainly participates in such re-mappings and her poetical journeying in her own family history can definitely be seen as a re-reading of gender and movement. After her first attempts at dealing with such questions in her second collection of poems, in her third book, *South of the Tudo Bem Café*, she looks more intensely at her own re-discoveries of femininity and of spaces and bodies as gendered.

In the first section of the book, "A Tapestry," named after one of its poems, Conn more openly explores her own past, and through the images of her relationship with both her father and mother, or through her observations of some of her family's routines, she seems to go further into the re-mapping of borders that enclose herself, her parents and even her siblings. In these poems, there is a strong connection between the figure of the father and the traveller or 'explorer' – the one who would be away from home, exploring and discovering new spaces – while the mother seems to be represented as enclosed in the domestic space (and sometimes even overwhelmed by it).[8] In "Fusion," for example, Conn explores the oppositional elements of these reconstructed images:

> As the eldest daughter
> I worship
> my father, the man who taught me
> to paddle a canoe in a storm
> while he sat in the bow
> and read *Scientific American*,
>
> not my mother, her dark hair
> curled around one finger

---

[8] In her poetry, Conn also recuperates her memories and feelings regarding her mother's suicide, which can be read as connected to the spaces the mother occupies in the family routines. In "One View from the Look-out Tower," for example, Conn approaches how the mother seemed quietly to resist a certain moulding of her life. The last stanza of the poem reads: "I stand on the silver / look-out tower, an adult woman, / and think that this is where you really died. / Florence Elliot Cole Conn. / Not in Denver, Colorado, in 1976, / locked in a garage with the car motor running, / but here, in Asbestos, you died / many times, in secret, / and none of us recognized the intricate darkness / that held you like a blacksmith / forging some hard and beautiful metal into a shape / that couldn't endure the bending" (*STBC* 29).

as she sleeps in the warmth of the cottage,
her face toward the row of maples
outside the window. (*STBC* 18)

In these verses, inner and outer spaces are redefined through the parents' positions in them, and there is also a sense of how Conn's reading of such spaces moulded or informed later choices in her own life. Yet, despite the apparent dichotomy these verses recover (defining the public space as male and the private as female), they also hint at the underlying stories informing them, and the possible implications surrounding this apparently divided space.[9] In the poem, the father, despite adventuring in the canoe, is also absorbed by the *Scientific American* world, not necessarily actively participating in his surroundings; while the mother, even if allegedly sleeping, is turned to the window, as if reading the outside world from a private domain. Through the juxtaposition of different images, Conn starts to re-map these spaces as not as transparent as they might seem, and through a re-reading of the positions she occupies in them, she challenges their unproblematic reading.

Despite the evident pull the images of the restless quest, represented by the father, exert on the daughter's imaginary about travel and exploration, this appeal is also counterbalanced by the continuous reading of the mother's position in her surroundings. As the speaker of "First Signs of Transformation" acknowledges:

Under the bedclothes
I read novel after novel,

---

[9] For a further discussion on how feminist criticism has challenged the dichotomy between private and public spaces and their relations to gender, see: Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, "Introduction: Women's Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies," *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial* Geographies, eds. A. Blunt and G. Rose (New York: The Guildford Press, 1994) 1-28.

whose heroes in dug-out canoes
explored the Orinoco, the Amazon. (*STBC* 23)

Yet, even in this attempt to escape the enclosure of the physical domestic space, such verses are also complicated by the fact that, while she, as the daughter, was indeed "discover[ing] El Dorado," her mother "minded five children, / played bridge & sang in the Sunday choir" (*STBC* 23). By connecting these images, Conn further explores the many layers that demarcate spatial boundaries. If, as Eric Leed notes, "[t]ravel is a gendering activity" and "[t]here is no free and mobile male without the unfree and sessile female" (221), Conn attempts to resist a reading of herself as enclosed in the domestic space. Yet, at the same time she rejects such space, she recovers it, since the stories surrounding her mother's personal journeys also inform her own restless search.

In "I Am a Visitor in My Mother's House," for example, the images of the domestic space as feminine and enclosing are once more presented, and as its title suggests, the speaker does not seem to include herself in such as space, since defining herself as a "visitor" in it. Yet, she enters it and explores it, and in this house's rooms, her sisters sleep

in one dark bedroom down the hall,
the blinds pulled down,
on hide-a-beds, opened up
as exposed as a woman's dresser drawer
full of lingerie. (*STBC* 25)

Through these images, the speaker's gaze goes beyond the shut blinds, and in revealing the room's beds, bodies and drawers, the speaker also reveals its marked femininity. The location is also defined by the presence of the mother,

> In the garden
> in a large straw hat, my mother
> hums a tune she used to sing
> with my father,
> when he still had a voice
> like Mario Lanza. (*STBC* 25)

Yet, despite the memory of the father, the mother is represented as being alone, with her piano "placed carefully / among the tiger lilies and hydrangeas. / She sits on the stool / and nods at the magnolias" (*STBC* 25). It is at this moment the speaker realizes:

> My father isn't around.
> He was last seen dancing on the hearth,
> the hearth made of pebbles and shells,
> as though the whole house
> were a ship, and he, the captain,
> dressed for the last formal dinner
> in top hat and tails, made
> a final exit, leaving us
> to sink. (*STBC* 26)

Dancing, probably to the mother's tunes, the father disappears, and in this final realization, the speaker includes herself in the father's abandonment – even if resisting it, she is part of the mother's house, she recognizes her own movement as gendered and how both private and public spaces interlock in the re-mapping of the self. In this context, Conn's own travelling quest is not only informed by her father's "footsteps," but also by her mother's many private journeys.[10] Such recognition allows Conn to destabilize the discourse of travel, since its traditional modes of representation inevitably mark an absence, or a gap, between travelled space and the space left behind. The silences of her mother's stories are recovered in Conn's poetical encounters; yet, instead of dwelling on them, she actually resists, through her writing, the stasis imposed on her female self.

In this sense, Conn's writing can be approached as bridging some of the gaps left in a traditional history of exploration and in the writing of difference and new territories. It seems that, through her "long cord" of creation, she re-inscribes the links between her own travelling and gendered body and the travelled landscapes of her poetical encounters. Even if one does not necessarily approach Conn's re-reading of her personal memories as also embedded in a re-mapping of travel and the travel discourse, such interrelations are definitely emblematic of the poet's representations of "inner" and "outer" realms. Conn's inner (or private) worlds can, in fact, be read as a public re-discovery of the inevitable legacies of a historical discourse of travel and exploration usually populated by male characters, such as the heroes of the novels she used to read as a child. Her own travel experiences are marked by these same legacies, but she also challenges them as she attempts to read "their silences." In Conn's writing on travel, the travelled space, besides being the place for a reading of difference, is also a space for the re-reading and re-construction of identity narratives, and for this poet, these re-constructions are inevitably connected to a re-reading of gender. As the bottled ship from this section's epigraph, Conn recognizes that her position in travel encounters is bounded by the materiality of her own body. The implications of such recognitions to her reading of travelled spaces, particularly Brazil, are the next paths I follow in my reading of Conn's poetry.

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[10] The intricacies between both realms (the mother's and the father's) follow Conn throughout her writing. The recovery of her family memories is further explored in later work as well, such as in the section "What It Is That's Missing," in *What Dante Did with Loss* (1994), in which the poet journeys towards the imaginary and the memories around her mother's suicide, or in the section "Namesake," in ***Beauties on Mad River: Selected and New Poems*** (Montreal: Signal Editions, 2000).

"But there was a whole interconnected world here:" Brazilian Encounters in Jan Conn's Travel Experiences.

At times what the eye can see
the heart misses completely [. . .]
"Three Poems for the Rio Xingú," Jan Conn

Brazil is indeed one of the spaces that figure as a travel or a literary destination in Conn's poetical writing. Since the publication of *South of the Tudo Bem Café*, Conn has constantly included poetical reflections on Brazil as part of her writing archive. Although her representations of the country are not necessarily separated from various poetical constructions of other places in Central and South America, Brazil does become a location of interest in Conn's writing and a significant space for her considerations on questions of travel and representation. Experiencing the country as both traveller and scientist, and crossing the American continent from North to South, Conn occupies a particular position in her encounters with the Brazilian other; it is through this material location she allows herself to reflect on her constructions of the Brazilian landscape. More than looking at this position as privileged and self-assuring, Conn actually reflects on the many intricacies involved in the crossing of boundaries between known and unknown spaces, and she allows her poetry to reveal the destabilizations embedded in such crossings.

In "Manaus," for instance, one of the first Brazil poems she publishes in *South of the Tudo Bem Café*, Conn describes her experience in this Amazonian city. In her recollections of the local zoo, the poet writes:

> Boa constrictors wind around vertical
> wooden shafts, draped over each other
> like shoelaces. The only animal that moves
> is a jaguar, whose caged pacing troubles me
> for days. (*STBC* 50)

As an object of observation, the exotic jaguar is literally framed for the observer's examinations of it. Yet, as the poet also recognizes, the animal is restless; its own nature cannot be contained in the zoo's cage, and it actually affects the poet, troubling her. Conn's recognition of the jaguar's restlessness could be read along the lines of James Clifford's considerations on the anthropological reading of other cultures. In "Partial Truths," Clifford challenges the transparency of the ethnographical discourse by re-inscribing in it the positionality of the observer's gaze. For this theorist, "cultures do not hold still for their portraits. Attempts to make them do so always involve simplification and exclusion, selection of a temporal focus, the construction of a particular self-other relationship, and the imposition or negotiation of a power relationship" (10). Conn's recognition seems to dialogue with Clifford's suggestions. By recognizing her own "troubled feeling" in relation to the jaguar's caged pace, Conn points toward the ambivalent position she occupies in a system of representation that, in a way or another, attempts to "contain" the other's difference inside an ordering frame. In this context, even if her poetry destabilizes the discourse of travel and exploration, her poetical writing on Brazil can also be approached as opening up a space for challenging the role of the traveller as a writer of the other. It is exactly this tension between the framing observer's look and what cannot necessarily be contained in the frame of representation that permeates much of Conn's writing on Brazil.

In many of the poems from her first group of poetical writing on Brazil, Conn demonstrates a certain anxiety in attempting to re-discover this new space while imposing her own desires through the observation of landscape.[11] As Conn ironically recognizes in "Belém," which is named after a capital city she visits in the north of Brazil, her own eagerness in experiencing difference and newness is still embedded in a desire to travel and re-discover the cultural other. The first stanza of the poem reads:

> I didn't come here to lose myself
> or to find myself, as I might have done at the age
> of seventeen. I came to Belém
> to examine the white marble
> Teatro da Paz, to wander among the
> shrimp-boats crowded in the harbour,
> to eat *moqueca* and *empâdinhas* [sic] *de camarão*,
> to meet the ghosts of Alfred Russel Wallace
> and Henry Bates strolling along Avenida Castillo Franca. (*STBC* 88)[12]

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[11] This first group of poems was published in *South of the Tudo Bem Café* (1990).

[12] As Conn explains in her Notes at the end of her book, *empadinha de camarão* is "pastry filled with shrimps" (101) and *moqueca* is "fish or mussels simmered in hot pepper and oil" (102).

In these verses, the "examining I" is clearly interested in exploring and re-discovering the cultural elements that mark the other's differences, such as its monuments, picturesque landscapes, or food. Moreover, by rescuing the ghosts of nineteenth-century European scientific explorers such as Russel Wallace or Henry Bates, Conn recognizes her position as a "writer of the other," who, similarly to the travellers before her, also create meanings about this exotic space. These new meanings are inescapably connected to previous narratives on travel and exploration. For George Robertson and his co-editors, either if challenging or reviewing it, contemporary travel stories are inevitably rooted in the narratives of the past (4). In this sense the very acts of covering distances and reading spaces become also a reading of how these spaces were constructed throughout historical discourses. It seems that Conn's verses recuperate this same recognition. Despite the alleged self-detachment in the speaker's drive for the other, there is also the recognition that her own position in the new cultural space depends on how the self re-reads or re-maps previous cultural encounters.

Conn's position as a "re-discoverer" of the Brazilian other is also marked by her own attempts to control (contain) or translate her experience in the poetical imagination. In a poem such as "The Surf on Guanabara Bay," the first Brazil poem that appears in her collection, Conn in fact reveals the ambivalence present in the relations between the perception of the scenery travelled and the traveller's desires for its exotic otherness. In this poem, Conn re-constructs her experience in the city of Rio de Janeiro, ordering it according to an erotic reading of the sea-shore. In her descriptions, even the "creamy-white curl" of "malachite and emerald waves" are compared to "the froth / of sex: driven out of one body / and into another" (*STBC* 47). For the speaker, what defines this city is:

"Copacabana Beach at 10 a.m. on a Sunday, / its erotic reputation muted by hang-overs, / rows of sleek bodies oiled like machines" (*STBC* 47). The speaker's observations are marked by her own desires to read the city as embedded in its "erotic reputation," and in this context, she asks: "What happens to people who dwell in a city / devoted to pleasure?" (*STBC* 47). "Caging" (or containing) the observed scenery in a sexual discourse, the observer transforms every portion of this surrounding in an eroticized element:

> [. . .] The Magellanic Cloud,
> a smear of sperm across the heavens,
> illuminates southern Brazil.
>
> A cannonball tree sprouts fruit from its waist,
> clusters of giant gonads. The man in a leopard skin body-suit
> claims they are smaller than his own,
> offering me an ardour to end all ardours. (*STBC* 47)

Conn's reading of the scenery dialogues with the reputed sensuality of this city, described as such since the very first colonial accounts, when traveller-explorers would describe not only the fertility of the Brazilian land, but also the beauty and sensuality of the native body.[13] Conn's speaker seems eager to dive into such sensuality, looking for it in every corner of her eyes; her travel experience is permeated by the exotic markers of the travelled space. Yet, even if embedded in this erotic desire, the last stanza of the poem also lets go the recognition of the dangers of such a reading of scenery:

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[13] See, for example, my discussion in the first chapter of Jean de Léry's *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, or Pero Vaz the Caminha's letter to the king of Portugal. See also Almeida's comments on Page's reading of Brazil in Chapter 4.

> Past the white and black mosaic of sidewalks,
> the surf of Guanabara Bay looks elegant, boa-like,
> snake and feather. The kind of seductive, murderous
> green you might swim into, stunned by colour and light,
> with an undertow that could carry you as far as Africa. (*STBC* 47)

In this last stanza, the speaker also recognizes the shortcomings of looking at scenery as only pure beauty and sensuality. The seduction of the spectacle can also be destructive to its "divers," since it carries meanings hidden by its "undertows." These verses attempt a destabilization of the "erotic reputation" of the Brazilian city, at the same time they acknowledge the traveller's desires for it. The tension between these two pulls is not resolved, though, since both pleasure and peril seem to be the caging bars that Conn chooses to contain and represent her other.

From the lush of the *carioca* scenery, Conn also travels to the dryness of the northeast region of the country, immediately disrupting the images of sensuality and fertility of the Brazilian landscape. In "By a Line of Eucalyptus," the poet reconstructs the hardships of life in this deserted area of the country; this time, instead of the welcoming of the surrounding landscape, the poet reads its loneliness and the web of stories hidden in its empty spaces. The poem opens with a sense of desolation: "On the roadside, one black shoe / huddles in the white dust. / Vultures scrabble over the shreds of a snake" (*STBC* 49). As if further to define the condition of this place, the speaker continues: "Everyone in the northeast [. . .] / worships the god of rain. / Day after cloudless day, he doesn't / show his face" (*STBC* 49). In this abandonment, "a dark woman in a blue dress / bends into the dry arms of maize" (*STBC* 49). There is no apparent solution for this harsh cycle of lack of rain, and as the speaker recognizes:

> Release is the dead lizard
> slung on the back of a man whose skin
> brings the dry herb smell of the *caatinga*
> to his family.
>
> Dust on his gun, his small
> woven hunting bag. The story
> of a pink cactus blossom beside
> the sleeping lizard. Later,
> the sapphire belt of the Orion overhead,
> green lightning bugs pulsing the empty fields. (*STBC* 49)[14]

In these stanzas, the observer's attention to detail is precise: from the smell of the *caatinga* in the hunter's skin, to the size of his bag (small, as probably there is no use for a larger one), and the story he tells about the cactus blossom, all contribute to the particularization of this man's experience in the land. In Conn's reading of it, there is no much hope or escape. The speaker seems distanced from it, and the emptiness re-defined in the last verse of the poem only adds to the sense of separation between the observed region (framed under the scrutinizing portrait of the observer's) and the traveller's experience of the place. Hardship and poverty are indeed examined, but from a distance, with no apparent involvement between traveller and travelled space.

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[14] *Caatinga*, as Conn explains in her Notes at the end of her book, means "scrub forest bushes inland from the Atlantic coast in northeastern Brazil (between the states of Maranhão and Pernambuco)" (101).

Images like the ones Conn portrays in a poem such as "By a Line of Eucalyptus" could indeed be approached as "mere postcards" (see reference to Clarke on page 252). Even if this particular portrayal of the Brazilian northeast would not be the typical postcard image of the country, it still frames its other in the seemingly stillness of representation. Moreover, as the pictures of Guatemala also "sent home" in her second collection of essays, this first group of Brazil poems presents precise "glimpses" of a different culture, which fascinates and at the same time overwhelms the observer with its abundance of signals, colours, and places. In fact, it seems that Conn is constantly reminding herself of her "examining I," with its drive for difference and otherness and its attempt to control (or cage) experience. The focus on the mastering of the landscape outside the self could even be approached as a strategy for the containment of images, as a way she found to avoid her complete absorption in the other's difference. Nevertheless, as her poem "Manaus" reminds us, the caged pace of the jaguar, even if "contained," is still restless, and in the most unexpected moments, it returns the observer's gaze back to the self. The self-assured traveller-observer, if ever so slightly, starts to be unsettled by the experience of difference, and by the recognition that, in the crossing of boundaries, she is not the only one with "examining eyes."

In "Mato Grosso," for instance, Conn describes a visit to Pantanal, a protected region famous for its swampy areas and its rich ecosystem. In this visit, not only does the speaker recognize the vastness and beauty of the space, but she also discovers her own desires for "assimilating" such beauty in her careful examinations. After describing their arrival in the Pantanal region, and the guards' inspection of their cars – who were possibly searching "for guns" or for "sacks / for the gorgeous plumage / of the *colhereiro*, or the royal purple / breast feathers of the kingfisher" (*STBC* 87),[15] the speaker focuses on the amazing scenery being observed. From "egrets the colour of new snow, / their reptilian necks undulating" (*STBC* 87), to "jabiru storks" that, unsettled by the travellers' presence, "soar off against a backdrop of luminous fields / skywriting in a cool language / of wind and cloud and rain" (*STBC* 87). In such a rich and varied landscape, the travellers' eyes are constantly focusing on its wonders, and, as the speaker tells: "At every small log bridge / we stop to examine the lavender and white blooms / of water-flowers" (*STBC* 87). Yet, as the speaker realizes, they are not alone:

> Black *jacaré* are everywhere
> in the reeds. Their bodies play dead.
> But their narrow golden eyes
> notice every move we make. (*STBC* 87)[16]

Here, the observing gaze is unexpectedly returned to the observer. Even if carefully distancing herself from the landscape, her position there inevitably interferes in her surroundings. In this sense, by ending her poem with the *jacaré*'s eyes, Conn seems to realize that boundaries and borders between traveller and travelled space are not only guarded by the reservation officers (as the speaker notices in the first verses of the poem), but also by its own inhabitants (even if symbolically, through the *jacaré*'s eyes). Though easily crossed, these borders are not necessarily forgotten, and the speaker recognizes she is also being observed and examined in her movement inside the travelled landscape.

Even in "Belém," the poem quoted in the opening of this section, Conn challenges the position the traveller occupies in her encounters with difference. Despite the traveller's allegedly self-forgetfulness in affirming she did not go to Belém "to lose [. . .] or find [herself]" (*STBC* 88) and in positioning her exploring eyes towards the experience of difference, in the second and third stanzas of the poem, the perspective changes. Instead of only focusing on the "outside," the speaker looks back to her "inner world," and her memories are brought into light:

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[15] Conn defines *colhereiro* as "common name for the roseate spoonbill, *Ajaia ajaja*" (101).

[16] Conn defines *jacaré* as "cayman, the common name for *Caiman crocodilus*, found through much of Latin America" (101).

> I sit outside the anthropology museum
> recalling the canary-yellow flowers
> of the *palo blanco* trees
> in a small Central America country,
> and the terrible whine of cicadas
> along the black of a highway.
>
> I didn't meet your brother who died
> on that road eleven years ago
> but I remember the heat and the cars
> slowing down to examine us as we walked,
> as if they could read a bit of his death on our faces. (*STBC* 88)

In these verses, the "examining I" is caught in the recollection of being examined, and the juxtaposition of such actions (particularly after the speaker had recovered images of exploration translated in the names of travel explorers or in the visitation of the anthropology museum) becomes extremely significant in the context of Conn's poetical encounters: through these memories, the reader recognizes that observer and observed – self and other – are not completely separate from each other, and their interrelations are by the speaker's memories of particular trips taken around the world. These memories also reproduce the stereotypical imaginary of the locations travelled, from the pastoral bleating goats "leaping up the cliffs" of the Narrows at St. Johns (*CP* 57-58) to the eroticized Marrakesh prostitutes who "balanced their tea-trays on their heads / and did their belly-dances" (*CP* 58). Neither "serious book" nor "automatic" travel appears to provide "what travels should have been" since they present "[e]verything only connected by 'and' and 'and'" (*CP* 58). Yet, in the last stanza, the speaker insists:

> Open the book. (The gilt rubs off the edges
> of the pages and pollinates the fingertips.)
> Open the heavy book. Why couldn't we have seen
> this old Nativity while we were at it?
> -- the dark ajar, the rocks breaking with light,
> an undisturbed, unbreathing flame,
> colorless, sparkless, freely fed on straw,
> and, lulled within, a family with pets,
> -- and looked and looked our infant sight away. (*CP* 58-59)

In these very last verses of Bishop's poem, again the appeal to "sight" is explicit, and the ambivalence of such appeal is also striking. The speaker seems embedded in the rhetoric of "seriousness" of the heavy book, which catalogues and indexes difference and unfamiliarity in an already too familiar (Western or Occidental) discourse. Through the insistence in opening the book, the speaker appears to be interested in keeping its complicities with the "heavy book" that still "pollinates" the "fingertips" (even if the word 'gilt," as some critics have already pointed out, also brings to mind the connotation of a "guilty" activity). At the same time, the question regarding the Nativity scene reiterates the first poetical attempt at the opening of the poem – of defining the seriousness involved in reading cultural images. Yet, once more this attempt is destabilized by the description of what is almost a "still life" where this "family with pets" becomes devoid of any cultural meaning or particular historical readings attached to it. As Fortuny argues in her reading of this poem's ending, "just at the point when the sign appears to be utterly dissembled [. . .] there comes a surge in signification that, however unavailable to the speaker, nevertheless sparks a change in her consciousness" (59). For me, this moment of recognition comes exactly in relation to the fresh engagement of these images, the stillness of their representation, and how they are seen as separate from the meanings imposed upon them by the concordance. It is through the re-reading of the image of the Nativity, which comes as a "parenthetical" comment in the grammatical organization of the poem, that the possible meaning of "looking and looking our infant sight away" becomes closer to the reader: the speaker may be recognizing her sight is not ingenuous, silent (as Jeffrey Gray suggests) or automatic (as Fortuny argues) anymore. By engaging the image of the Nativity (and even the act of reading) afresh, through its details, the speaker again repositions the self in the relation between observer and observed.

It can be said that Bishop's "way of looking" does not necessarily confine her other as a piece for a museum (in an archaeological search for cultural markers) or as a serious and engraving narrative – much as the concordance does. Despite Bishop's awareness of her complicities with a particular Western discourse of exploration, in poems such as "2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," she attempts to un-map the ready-made assumptions about the relationship between familiar and unfamiliar constructions by challenging grand-narratives of discovery through her focus on close observation. Yet, such un-mapping immediately positions her in a process of re-discovery, where self and other are also both re-read and re-inscribed. It is inside this ambivalent questioning of representation that Bishop's writing on her Brazilian other takes place. The experience of living in Brazil for more than twenty years allowed Bishop to reflect more deeply on her "questions of travel." This experience will be approached in the next two chapters.

Chapter 2 – "[W]here the shoes don't fit my feet:" Bishop's North and South Connections

[. . .]with no gift for languages
and even less for gestures
but my dollar goes higher & higher—
exchange   anxiety
with a visa about to expire,
with a car with one good tire—   Brazil, "where the nuts come from"
"Letter to Two Friends," Elizabeth Bishop

"Letter to Two Friends" is one of Bishop's unpublished poems recently collected in *Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-Box: Uncollected Poems, Drafts, and Fragments*, edited by Alice Quinn. In her notes, Quinn points out the probable date of the poem, 1957, referring to a letter Bishop wrote to Robert Lowell from the same year, in which she mentions the poem, started two years before (317). According to Quinn, alternative titles were "A Letter Home" and "Letter Back" (317). Despite the fact this particular poem was never completed or published during Bishop's life time, it marks a significant aspect of the poet's activities when living in Brazil: her attempts to "send home" poetical mediations of her experience in the South American country. As previously discussed, Bishop avoided more direct commentary about her private life in public and poetical writing, mainly if this involved social and economic comments such as the ones presented in the epigraph above. Yet, the final "pun" with the word "nuts" in this stanza reveals much more than Bishop's witty word play – it also reveals an ambiguity in relation to the country that permeates much of Bishop's writing on Brazil. Even if she is certainly aware of her privileged position in the country (especially due to her social and economic status), this particular stanza also marks an uncertainty in relation to other cultural elements (language, visa, and even food) that, as the poem suggests, demonstrates Bishop's anxiety toward the Brazilian other. In this chapter, then, I focus mainly on the poet's letter-writing and on her Nova Scotia works as Bishop's attempts to negotiate her own position in a country she chose to live almost "by chance."

Bishop lived in Brazil from December 1951 until 1970, although 1974 was really the date of her last trip there. What started as a "long tale of woe" due to "a fantastic allergic reaction" to the cashew fruit (*OA* 231), as Bishop tells Dr. Anny Baumann in a letter right after her arrival, became a long-term relationship with a new place, new people, new culture, and new scenery. Bishop had never really had an intended plan to move to Brazil. Her stay there happened not only due to her allergic reaction, which made her delay her trip to the rest of South America, but also due to the unexpected relationship she developed with Lota de Macedo Soares, who became her partner for almost fifteen years. In her first letters from Brazil, Bishop still made plans of continuing her trip to South America later in the year of 1952, but already in April, she travelled to New York with Lota to arrange the details for moving to Brazil (Millier 245).[1] During the almost two decades she lived in the country, she spent most of her time in Rio de Janeiro, mainly in the city of Petrópolis, where she lived in the house Lota was building in her estate in the countryside, in a region known as Samambaia; such house became one of the "jewels" of modern architecture in Brazil. In the 1960s, Bishop bought a house in the baroque city of Ouro Preto, in the state of Minas Gerais, where she also lived during her stay in the country. Places such as São Paulo, Belém, Mato Grosso and Manaus were other travel destinations for Bishop as well.

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[1] Instead of using Lota's full name, I will use her first name, since this is the way she is mostly addressed throughout Bishop's writing and the criticism on Bishop's work.

Bishop's experience living in Brazil is described many times as a very happy moment of her life (*OA* 232, 233, and so on), but her relationship with the country is also full of wonders and surprises that constantly defy her notion of understanding of such unexpected surroundings. In this sense, her construction (or re-discovery) of Brazil is first and foremost permeated by a redefinition of known and unknown spaces to which the poet attributes particular meanings as a way to negotiate her own position there. Brazil, first as a travel destination, and then as a place for settling down, is very different from any other travel experience Bishop already had up to that moment in her life. Maybe even inspired to see the world from an unusual perspective or to defy the already "too familiar" images of travel destinations such as the ones presented in "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," Bishop sets up to this trip to South America probably eager for the experience of difference, but not necessarily prepared for what she encounters inland. Different from visiting a country such as England, for example, an experience Bishop compared, in an interview with Edward Lucie-Smith, to "going to the movie after you've read the book" (13), Bishop's experience of Brazil is, to say the least, fairly disorienting, since it is not easily translated into the familiarity of knowledge of her North American background. Upon her arrival in Brazil, some of the questions that already populated her poetical imagination regarding travel, geography and representation start to be explored even more deeply.

One of the questions that permeates most of Bishop's writing on Brazil is how her particular experience in this country shapes her representations of the Brazilian other. More than simple descriptions of her surroundings, her writing on Brazil demonstrates the complexities involved in observing and representing a different cultural environment.

As a North American travelling south of the Equator, and eventually settling down in a foreign country, Bishop has to negotiate her position in Brazil, particularly her position as a writer of Brazil, which is not an activity she uncritically welcomes. Also, despite having published some of her writing in Brazil, her main audience is in North America – an audience that does not necessarily share a similar background on the foreign country. In this sense, Bishop becomes what Paulo Henriques Britto has called a "cultural intermediary." For him, through "her abundant correspondence, her work in the Time-Life book *Brazil*, her translation of Helena Morey's diary, her anthology of modern Brazilian poetry [. . .] and, not least, her poems on Brazilian themes, she acted as an interpreter of Brazil for North Americans" (1). Bishop indeed serves the role of "mediator" or "interpreter" of another culture to an American audience, and she even acknowledges, in her interview with Ashley Brown in 1966, that what she wanted to do in her planned book of prose about Brazil was "to make [it] seem less remote and less an object of picturesque fancy" (29). After a few years in Brazil, she is obsessed with the idea of writing about it. She spends quite a long time trying to finalize this essay collection on Brazil, to which she would frequently refer in her letters, although this collection is never completed. It seems that Brazil presents itself as a representational problem to Bishop; one not easily resolved, since it would involve an articulation of her position as an "outsider" (a North American observer) and also of a perception of the country in its own terms, something of an ideal as well, since any kind of perspective over the country would be inevitably permeated by her mediation of it.

Another important aspect of Bishop's writing on Brazil is that her position in the country is also ambivalent. As some critics have already noticed, first as a traveller and then as a resident who travels and explores different geographical locations inside Brazil, Bishop occupies, simultaneously, the positions of traveller, settler, exile, and outsider, characteristics that mark her perceptions and representations. Bishop's relationship with Brazil is very much permeated by her experience of settling down in Petrópolis, and living with Lota, an upper-class social figure in Brazil, whose family was very influential and known in social and political circles of the *carioca* society. Living with an upper-class Brazilian, and also in a very good economic situation due to the exchange rate between the U.S. currency and the Brazilian currency at the time (at least for the first ten years she was there), Bishop's Brazil is not exactly an under-privileged one, and she even recognizes her status there as one of the economically privileged in the country. Quoting from a geography book in a letter from October 1952, for example, Bishop describes Petrópolis and how she sees herself there: "'During the summer months the wealthier people (that's me) of Rio de Janeiro seek the lower temperature (9 degrees) and the more active social life of the community of Petrópolis'" (*OA* 249). Moreover, due to Lota's fluency in both English and French, and since many of their friends in Brazil were fluent in these languages, Bishop's communication with her surroundings is mediated by this particular circle of relations.[2] In one of her interviews she argues that she "began to understand [Portuguese] itself in the kitchen" (qtd. in Schiller 77), despite the fact that a few years after her arrival in Brazil, Bishop was already translating Helena Morley's diary.

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[2] Through Lota, Bishop was introduced to significant names in the Brazilian social circles of her time, from important architects, such as Henrique Mindlin (whose book Bishop translated into English), to political people, such as Carlos Lacerda (who was Lota's intimate friend, and a political opposition leader who acted against president Getúlio Vargas's government), and even to literary names, such as the poets Manuel Bandeira and Vinícius de Morais (whose poems she would translate later). Bishop was also in touch with the American embassy in Rio de Janeiro and would participate in events organized by it, or even receive some American visitors in their house.

At the same time that the cultural and social circle of Petrópolis mediates Bishop's experience in Brazil, the poet is also evidently interested in the new culture and the country's different possibilities regarding its way of life, its people and its surroundings. In her first letters from Brazil, she actually delights in living in "complete confusion" of senses. In a letter from July, 1952, for example, she writes: "my Anglo-Saxon blood is gradually relinquishing its seasonal cycle and I'm quite content to live in complete confusion, about seasons, fruits, languages, geography, everything" (*OA* 243). In this same letter, she mentions how amazed she is by the warmth of the people: "It is really a wonderful country in some ways. Where, when you arrive, the janitor and the porter and the cook all hug you tenderly and call you 'madame, my daughter'" (*OA* 244). She is clearly interested in flora and fauna, and in a letter from 1953, she tells friends of her excitement in preparing to what she calls "quite an expedition" to the city of Ouro Preto, the baroque colonial town in the state of Minas Gerais (*OA* 259). In later years, expeditions to the Amazon and to the São Francisco River would also form part of her Brazilian experience.

In this sense, Bishop experiences much of the newness and difference of Brazil from and through the Samambaia house, in Petrópolis, a protected and enclosed space, where the encounter with the Brazilian other can be, to some extent, controlled. Thus, even if absorbing much of her surroundings, Bishop is always able to keep certain boundaries inside her "Brazilian life-style." She settles down and lives in the country but never abandons her North American affiliations.[3] As Victoria Harrison points out, Bishop never necessarily lost her connections with her North American background, keeping in touch with it through her correspondence, her receipt of literary journals and magazines, and access to political news (143). She kept herself very much grounded, residing in Brazil and occupying a position of self-imposed exile, from which she was distanced enough to think and talk about both Brazilian and American relations.

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[3] In a letter to Robert Lowell in 1960, Bishop writes: "It is one of my greatest worries now—how to use everything and keep on living here, most of the time, probably—and yet be a New Englander herring-choker bluenoser at the same time" (*OA* 384).

It is exactly from this ambivalent space that her poetical writing on Brazil happens, becoming an opportunity for Bishop's experimentations with questions of observation and representation. Attempting to write about the Brazilian other without only making it a portrayal of a picturesque fancy, Bishop focuses on re-mapping the boundaries between known and unknown spaces in Brazil, connecting or reaching out to the Brazilian difference. At the same time, her writing also marks a very specific location for the self. According to Harrison, "when [Bishop] explored ethnic subjectivity" in her writing on Brazil, for example, "she was aware of and would attempt to achieve what she called in a drafted introduction to her never-completed book of prose essays on Brazil 'a double point of view'" (10), neither completely foreign nor completely Brazilian. For Harrison, this characteristic demonstrates the "collaborative nature" of Bishop's writing on Brazil, since it "locates the points of conversation between an outsider's insight and a Brazilian familiarity" (147). It is in the "intimate dialogue" of these different subjectivities that Harrison finds Bishop's most powerful writing (including her translation of Brazilian poems and prose). Indeed, Bishop's writing on Brazil can be approached from this "interstitial space," this double point of view, which both approximates and separates her Brazilian other. Yet, instead of only approaching it as "collaboration" (between foreign and familiar looks at Brazil) one can also read this idea of a "double point of view" as an attempt to articulate, in writing, a re-mapping of self and other in the transposition of boundaries imposed by known and unknown spaces. Instead of simply translating the "Brazilian difference" in familiar and known terms, or of hybridizing experience, collapsing both self and other, Bishop's poetical writing on Brazil actually reveals the other through her subjectivity (which is changing and changed by her new surroundings) without necessarily confining the other to the self. In other words, her writing on Brazil can be approached as "cultural mediations" (as Britto suggests), but mediations that let go her "way of seeing" or "looking at" the Brazilian other, marking the complexities of her position there. In this sense, her writing does not necessarily celebrate or reject the representation of difference in the intercultural space, but actually articulates its ambivalence, presenting both the potentials and the shortcomings of writing on cultural borders. As there is no easy way to overcome the boundaries of knowledge imposed on these spaces, Bishop's writing presents a way of looking at the other which marks its "constructedness" and the position of the self in the re-mapping of boundaries.

Despite the fact that such reflections and questionings on the nature of travel and representation permeate most of Bishop's poetical writing on Brazil, they are not automatically achieved or easily articulated. They are the result of her poetical experimentations, not only in her poetry, but also in her letter and prose writing. Maybe due to the unplanned nature of her stay in Brazil, and also to the country's many contrasting landscapes and situations, Bishop first approaches Brazil with admiration but also caution. Upon her arrival there, her comments on the new land seem to embody a conflicting duality between identification and rejection of difference and uncertainties. At the same time she demonstrates willingness to experience newness, there is also a counter-force attempting to ground this newness in North American terms. In her letter to Alfred Kazin, from mid-December 1951, she describes her train trip from São Paulo (her first destination in the country) to Rio de Janeiro as "dream-like" (*OA* 226), but after talking about the time spent with her friend Pearl Kazin in Rio, she comments:

> I don't think she likes Rio much.
>
> I don't think I do, either, but it's hard to say—it's such a *mess*—Mexico City and Miami combined is about the closest I can come to it; and men in bathing trunks kicking footballs all over the place. [. . .] It is enervating, completely relaxed (in spite of the terrific coffee), corrupt—for about three days I felt horribly depressed, but then recovered—mostly thanks to Pearl. (*OA* 226-227)

In these letter lines, Bishop reveals her uncertainty in relation to her travel destination, defying a sense of understanding of the new location, since permeated by elements of perception that make it different from "home." The place is read metonymically through mess, football, or coffee, immediately separating the traveller from the travelled destination. Yet, there is indecision in her writing. She is not sure whether or not she likes it, and the acknowledgment of feeling depressed reveals more about the traveller than the actual travelled space – is the sense of disappointment due to the newness of the country or to the traveller's realization of the kinds of impositions she is pressing on it?

This contradictory experience of "arriving" in a new country or in a new surrounding where the traveller has to create a certain space for knowledge to be challenged and reinvented is present in her first poem on Brazil, "Arrival at Santos." Already an experienced traveller when arriving in Brazil, and aware of the interplay between observer and observed in perceiving and representing difference, Bishop's first poetical writing on Brazil is more a reflection on tourist displacements than an actual discussion of the country per se. Bishop dates the poem January 1952 but, according to Brett Millier, it is drafted right after Bishop's arrival in Brazil, by mid-December, 1951 (244). The poem deals with the expectations involved in the traveller's search for difference at the same time he or she still imposes on the new surroundings a sense of attachment to the place of departure. Based on Bishop's own experience of arrival at the harbour of Santos after her trip from North to South America, and on her first impressions on Brazil, the poem articulates the feelings of wonder and disappointment that permeate the tourist's eagerness in comprehending and translating such experience of uncertainty into a familiar naming of the new surroundings:

> Here is a coast; here is a harbor;
> here, after a meager diet of horizon, is some scenery:
> impractically shaped and—who knows?—self-pitying mountains,
> sad and harsh beneath their frivolous greenery,
>
> with a little church on top of one. And warehouses,
> some of them painted a feeble pink, or blue,
> and some tall, uncertain palms. Oh, tourist,
> is this how this country is going to answer you
>
> and your immodest demands for a different world,
> and a better life, and complete comprehension
> of both at last, and immediately,

after eighteen days of suspension? (*CP* 89)

Due to its direct assessment of the traveller's consciousness regarding the act of travelling, many critics have approached this poem as Bishop's "mocking" of the tourist's attempts at trying to define the travelled space through a cultural baggage brought from home – an attempt at 'mastery' which is immediately destabilized by a lack of understanding of difference. According to Kim Fortuny, for example, this destabilization comes from Bishop's mockery of the language used to inscribe experience (34). In Fortuny's view, "[o]ur terms expose our capacity for negotiating difference, and in the case of the poem's opening, those terms are markedly limited" (34).[4] In this context, the speaker's personification of scenery can be approached as the self's mirroring in nature as if recognizing the sadness and impracticality of the travel experience, which only allows the traveller to impose a logic of understanding that does not really go beyond referentiality. The traveller's immodest demands for a different world, more than creating space for newness, actually obstruct the "view," creating a sense of immediate rejection or doubt in relation to the travelled space. Such obstruction (or imposition of knowledge) prevents what Victoria Harrison calls an intimate dialogue between the Brazilian difference and the tourist's expectations (147). Moreover, instead of looking at the poem's opening as a mere mocking of the experience of travel, the particular recognitions (or misrecognitions) present in these first verses also anticipate much of Bishop's later questionings on representation in her writing on Brazil: how much of a comprehension of difference is indeed possible in the travelling experience besides its translations into familiar and recognizable terms?

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[4] Fortuny approaches the structure of the poem's first verses as "remind[ing] us of the old ditty and its accompanying hand trick, 'Here is the church; here is the steeple,' Thus, the poem begins not only by reducing the speaker's "quest" to a game of identification for North American children but also by mocking the flat recognitions in language we resort to before we have mustered the rhetoric necessary to inscribe and thus create 'adult' experience" (34).

The sense of the traveller's unwillingness to negotiate difference becomes even more explicit in the poem when the speaker acknowledges her/his failure in recognizing the other through its cultural markers and national symbols. It is at the very moment of an attempted self-assured "landing" in the new country that the tourist-observer's privileged position gets once more destabilized:

> Finish your breakfast. The tender is coming,
> a strange and ancient craft, flying a strange and brilliant rag.
> So that's the flag. I never saw it before.
> I somehow never thought of there *being* a flag,
>
> but of course there was, all along. And coins, I presume,
> and paper money; they remain to be seen.
> And gingerly now we climb down the ladder backward,
> myself and a fellow passenger named Miss Breen,
>
> descending into the midst of twenty-six freighters
> waiting to be loaded with green coffee beans.
> Please, boy, do be more careful with that boat hook!
> Watch out! Oh! It has caught Miss Breen's
>
> skirt! There! Miss Breen is about seventy,

> a retired police lieutenant, six feet tall,
>
> with beautiful bright blue eyes and a kind expression.
>
> Her home, when she is at home, is in Glens Fall
>
> s, New York. There. We are settled. (*CP* 89-90)

The "reality" of the new surroundings becomes more concrete through the speaker's confrontation with national elements, such as the flag and money, which were admittedly not thought of before. These elements suddenly startle the speaker's ethnocentrism, even if briefly, until she also acknowledges a desire for what "remains to be seen." Thus, both speaker and Miss Breen, with caution, start their expedition towards the land, although their descending from the ship is also culturally marked: the two passengers are in direct contrast to the freighters waiting to be filled up with the national produce, the green coffee beans, which are the local and valued products for export. Through the juxtaposition of such images (even reinforced by the rhyming scheme of connecting "seen" and "Miss Breen" and then "beans" and "Miss Breen's"), the reader may wonder if indeed the tourists' "immodest demands" are once more translated in the "products of export" produced in the country. Could it be said that, as the freighters, both tourists are also eager to be "filled up" with a particular choice of scenery?[5] Yet, it is at this very moment that the relationship between traveller and travelled space changes. The experience of arrival becomes once more unsettling and even dangerous to the tourist through Miss Breen's physical discomfort of being caught up by a boat hook. Also a "product of export" herself (the North American retired tourist), Miss Breen's skirt is caught into the hook, as if symbolically exposing her "nakedness" (her physicality) to her cultural other. This surprising and unexpected moment of confusion can only be appeased by the speaker's memory of home, and the explanation of Miss Breen's origins. The tone and rhythm of the verses are then modified in the poem to bring a "settling" calmness to the experience again: "There. We are settled" (although the 's' from 'falls' that opens this particular verse seems to instil a feeling of adjustment, not yet completely reached).

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[5] These same formal features of the poem have also been discussed in Maria Clara Bonetti Paro, "Converging Frontiers: Elizabeth Bishop's 'North' and 'South,'" *"In Worcester, Massachusetts:" Essays on Elizabeth Bishop*, eds. Laura Jehn Menides and Angela G. Dorenkamp (New York: Peter Lang, 1999) 99-108. In this article, Paro argues that "[f]rom her first poem written in Brazil, Bishop establishes the basis of her critical view of questions of colonization. Making 'Miss Breen' rhyme with 'green coffee beans' she mocks the import-export relations between countries: 'out' go raw products, 'in' come tourists looking for the exotic but complaining about differences" (102).

Also, as if a call for "consciousness" in the game of recognitions of certain and uncertain boundaries between settled home and unsettled travel experience, Miss Breen's accident opens up a series of other "demands" on the new land, described in the final stanzas of the poem:

> The customs officials will speak English, we hope,
> And leave us our bourbon and cigarettes.
> Ports are necessities, like postage stamps, or soap,
>
> but they seldom seem to care what impression they make,
> or, like this, only attempt, since it does not matter,
> the unassertive colors of soap, or postage stamps—
> wasting away like the former, slipping the way the latter
>
> do when we mail the letters we wrote on the boat,
> either because the glue here is very inferior

> or because of the heat. We leave Santos at once;
>
> we are driving to the interior. (*CP* 90)

In these last verses, the reader may still perceive the speaker's anxiety for understanding the new through familiar terms (the travellers want to be left with their language, bourbon, and cigarettes). Also, by trying to dismiss the tourists' doubts and insecurities over a redefinition of the significance of "ports" and "customs," the speaker attempts to recover a certain authority or privileged position, already denied in their disruptive arrival. In his reading of the poem, Jonathan Ellis argues that "as the tourists near land and the reality of 'a different world' sinks in, the rhyme words suggest confusion and panic. Bishop is having poetic fun with the new arrivals, cutting into their linguistic bodies and homes in the poem as the Brazilian customs officials capture their bourbon and cigarettes on land" (*Art and Memory* 115). Indeed, even if the speaker's voice reveals an attempt to control experience, these last verses also reveal a sense of confusion and destabilization of understanding, and once more emphasize the separateness between "here" and "there."

However, despite the ironic destabilization initiated by Miss Breen's inelegant descending to the land, the closing verses of the poem also reveal a sense of intangibility of meaning which, as the soap colours or the glued stamps, waste or slip away. The tone of mockery of the tourist's insecurities actually seems to disappear in the final stanzas. A sense of frustration or disappointment, very much permeated by the tourist's inability to look at newness without feeling attached to a home-bound point of view, replaces mockery. The first "necessities" they look for in the new land, such as soap or stamps, are unassertive or inferior, if compared to home. At the very moment the idea of superiority invades the poem in the judgments of the soap or stamps, there seems to be an unexpected recognition: these impressions do not really matter since they are intangible, fading away from the tourist's perspective. A sense of incompleteness, disorder and chaos, which may liberate understanding but, in this particular first encounter, creates anxiety and separateness, characterizes the poem's ending. Bishop's first poem on Brazil becomes a reflection on what is involved in travelling and understanding difference in the shocking and unexpected space of new arrivals. The sense of intangibility present in the last verses is juxtaposed to a willingness to drive to the interior ("We leave Santos at once; / We are driving to the interior"), possibly as a way to run away from the superficiality of first impressions.

As other critics have suggested, this particular final verse of "Arrival at Santos" also anticipates Bishop's position later in Brazil, since the poet settles down in the country and seems interested in "driving to its interior," exploring and expanding the boundaries between her North American background and the Brazilian difference. Indeed, even if unexpectedly, Bishop does settle down in Brazil, and starts to construct a space for herself in the "new world" she creates with Lota in Petrópolis. It is interesting to note that, besides "Arrival at Santos" and another poem called "The Shampoo" (in which Bishop explores the surprising elements of her relationship with Lota in Samambaia),[6] she actually does not complete any more poetical (formal) writing on Brazil during her first years there.[7] In a letter from February 1953 (one year after her arrival in the country), she comments on her attempts to negotiate the publication of some stories in the *New*

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[6] The last stanza of "The Shampoo" reads: "The shooting stars in your black hair / in bright formation / are flocking where, / so straight, so soon? / --Come, let me wash it in this big tin basin, battered and shiny like the moon" (*CP* 84). Both "Arrival at Santos" and "The Shampoo" are included in Bishop's *A Cold Spring*.

[7] Also see Brett Millier's comments on Bishop's frustrated attempts to write on Brazil in her first years there: "After "Arrival at Santos" and "The Shampoo," she managed only "The Mountain" as a poetic exploration of Brazil in her early years there. It is perhaps her weakest published poem, and she abandoned the attempt to write about Brazil until after *Poems: North & South—A Cold Spring* had appeared in 1955. She launched several short stories about the country, none of which she never finished" (252).

Yorker arguing that "avoiding 'functional references' while trying to write a story about Brazil is impossible. I'm sure Lota makes a functional reference every time she opens her mouth and so do most of the people I know here" (*OA* 255). Brazil becomes then a space not easily explored in poetical writing, particularly due to the fact that the poet still has North America as her main audience. However, this does not mean Bishop forgets about her attempts at making sense of her new surroundings in writing. According to Brett Millier, during Bishop's first years in Brazil, despite her "inability" to write poetically about the country, she "explores" it in her letter-writing back home: "She complained often in early letters that she found herself unable to write about Brazil, but there she was, doing it, 'working' in the best sense, to learn what she thought about the country, to discover what tone she would take when she did come to write formal prose and poetry" (259). In this sense, her letter-writing becomes a medium for her first negotiations of her often contradictory representation of the Brazilian other, even though the main paradoxes of travel Bishop identifies in "Arrival at Santos" keep permeating her own letters on Brazil.

"So rude of Nature not to go away:" Bishop's Letter-Writing and the Brazilian Difference

"I must take Brazil more seriously [. . .] I must decide what I'm going to think about it"
Elizabeth Bishop's letter to Pearl Kazin
February 22, 1954

Recognizing her own need to order her experiences in Brazil into words, Bishop allows herself to explore, in her letter-writing, many of the ideas that start forming the core of her questioning of the Brazilian difference. The world Bishop creates in her letters is full of wonders, excitements, and contradictions, reflecting the poet's experimentations with writing and representing the exuberance of images she encounters in Brazil, combined with the country's social and economic context. Despite not being able to reconcile such images and experiences to a particular set of definitions that can un-problematically be applied to the complexities of the country, she experiments with both literalness and imagination in her writing on the Brazilian other. Her letters then allow her a certain freedom to explore her impressions of the other's difference – a freedom she does not necessarily consent to have in poetical writing.

As in her letters from Europe from the 1930s, when she mentions feeling obliged to describe everything she sees, her letters from Brazil are also full of details about flora, fauna, local colour and people, leading Bishop to practice close observation and explore the limits of literalness and "functionality" or "referentiality" of language, also helping her create a poetical imagination about the country. In her widely quoted first letter from Brazil to Marianne Moore, for example, Bishop's representation of her surroundings becomes emblematic of much of her later writing. In this letter, she describes the scenery of Petrópolis as "a sort of dream-combination of plant & animal life. I really can't believe it all. Not only are there highly impractical mountains all around with clouds floating in & out of one's bedroom, but waterfalls, orchids, all the Key West flowers I know & Northern apples and pears as well" (*OA* 236). Bishop's first writings on Brazil demonstrate her awareness in relation to the unexpectedness of the scenery, which can only be described as "dream-like" since so different from what she is used to. She is incredibly interested in such difference and looks at it with eager eyes. As Victoria Harrison reminds us, "[a]s a newcomer, Bishop is intrigued with whatever might surprise her next" (146) and it is this "curiosity" for the other's difference that her letters represent.[8]

The "impractical" (*OA* 234) and wondrous nature of Brazil is one of the elements most commented upon in her letters, and it would not be a complete exaggeration to say that almost any other Brazilian element represented in her letter-writing is mediated by Bishop's perception of the natural beauties of the country. Brazil is primarily seen as a natural paradise where the observer's eyes do not tire of finding out new details in flora and fauna to be observed and talked about, such as the Samambaia valley "filled with mist just like a bowl of milk" (*OA* 239) or the "little black [bird] who, with his mate, jumps up an down on a twig [. . .] just like a little rubber ball" (*OA* 243), or even the *jabuticaba* fruit that "pops out on the branches, right on the wood" (*OA* 246). Moreover, her views of the Brazilian nature demonstrate much of her own desire for imagining it as this "untouched" space, unspoiled by civilization, and she seems interested in dwelling in the poetical possibilities such "exoticism" or "difference" brings. In a letter dated March 1955 to James Merrill, Bishop comments on how she sees herself in the Brazilian nature:

> You say you imagine me in a "Rousseau jungle" – well, it is as beautiful as one, I think, but a lot sparser and rougher, and where I live, 50 miles or so from Rio, much more perpendicular. Like the Sugar Loaf in Rio harbor, only a great many of them, much bigger, inland a ways—with clouds spilling over the tops sometimes, or waterfalls coming and going according to the weather (there's an awful lot of

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[8] David Kalstone also comments on Bishop's mediations of her experience through her letters: "The joy in shaping such day-to-day encounters for her American correspondents [. . .] is apparent in her letters. [. . .] Through her letters Bishop made Brazil a place where she could lead congenially double lives. In one sense the letters were the shuttle between her art and her life, a new loom. [. . .] she could take the present in its confused and exotic and absorbing randomness and also, in correspondence, bring into play the distanced eye of friends." (*Becoming a Poet* 154-155).

> weather here). Things are very much out of scale, too, like a Rousseau—or out of our scale, that is. The "Samambaia" mentioned at the top of the page is a giant fern, big as a tree, and there are toads as big as your hat and snails as big as bread and butter plates, and during this month butterflies the color of this page and sometimes almost as big flopping about— Combined with the "*Quaresma*," or Lent, trees, a mournful purple, the color scheme is wonderful—maybe a little Dorothy-Draperish in March. But scenery aside, I like living here very much and have a very nice place to live and nice friends. (*OA* 303)

However, in her own words, if one puts "scenery aside," there is not much left in Bishop's descriptions of her Brazilian life. The aesthetic construction of Brazil is one of the most important features of Bishop's letters, and it is interesting to notice her focus on its "disproportions" or "out of scale" elements. Such elements make it wondrous or exotic, but at the same time connect her to the environment since grounding her experience in a visual re-discovery of the country. Bishop's visual experience of Brazil's nature in her letters lingers between the "tourist's immodest demands" and the "explorer's re-discoveries of a new world," repositioning her as a new consumer and discoverer of the tropical other.

Indeed, it is relevant to note that, in letters from her first years in Brazil, she comments on her interest in reading European and North American narratives of exploration and journeying in South America. Probably due to the exploratory tone of her letter-writing on the country (registering encounters with unusual places, people, flora and fauna), these books provide her with some 'background knowledge' on the new surroundings. In a letter from December 1953 she mentions a book called *A Naturalist in*

Brazil, which she liked for being "the only book that really tells the things one wants to know [. . .]. It's just a very good, old-fashioned account of the flora and fauna and the man who wrote it sounds nice" (*OA* 279-280).[9] As if attempting to establish a link between her own travels in Brazil with previous expeditions, these readings offer Bishop a "foreign" look into Brazil to which she can compare her own experience in the 'new land." Her readings of Charles Darwin's works start at this moment as well, and they are good examples of the kinds of "dialogue" she initiates between her observations of the country and its culture, and other explorers' portrayals. In one of her letters to Pearl Kazin (from February 1953), Bishop describes her reading of Darwin:

> I've been having a wonderful time reading Darwin's journal on the *Beagle*—you'd enjoy it too. In 1832 he is saying, "Walked to Rio (he lived in Botofogo) [sic]; the whole day has been disagreeably frittered away in shopping." "Went to the city to purchase things. Nothing can be more disagreeable than shopping here. From the length of time the Brazilians detain you," etc. etc. One wonderful bit about how a Brazilian complained that he couldn't understand English Law—the rich and respectable had absolutely no advantage over the poor! It reminds me of Lota's story about a relative, a judge, who used to say, "For my friends, cake! For my enemies, *Justice*!" (*OA* 255)

Through recounting of some of Darwin's anecdotes about Brazil (especially engaging to a friend such as Kazin who had also shared the Brazilian experience), Bishop is deliberately attempting to re-construct her own experiences in the land as if also informed by this sense of "tradition," or as part of a circuit of narratives that "authenticate" or

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[9] Bishop does not include the complete bibliographical reference in her letter. Yet, most likely, the book she refers to is: Konrad Guenther, *A Naturalist in Brazil: the Record of a Year's Observation of her Flora, her Fauna and her People*, trans. Bernard Miall (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931).

"authorize" her own look at the other, particularly due to the ironic tone she is applying in her narrative. These readings also seem to provide Bishop with a sense of balance between known and unknown boundaries, since her experience of the Brazilian difference would not be in complete isolation from other narratives about the country. The narratives of exploration also offer her a sense of grounding of experience, creating a milieu where "discoveries" speak to each other, and repeat themselves to a certain extent. In this sense, Bishop's letters from Brazil become also an "exploratory" narrative, embedded in a dialogue with foreign looks at Brazil.

However, to argue that Bishop's representations of the Brazilian surroundings are simply a re-inscription of colonial travel narratives of exploration is an oversimplification of the complexities involved even in her letter-writing. Nature indeed attracted her and the literal representations of its exuberance were something she attempted in her letters, even while being aware of their limitations. As mentioned previously, Bishop wanted to avoid re-inscribing the picturesque in her writing on Brazil.[10] Also in a letter to Robert Lowell she writes, "I worry a great deal about what to do with all this accumulation of exotic or picturesque or charming details, and I don't want to become a poet who can only write about South America" (*OA* 383-384). In this sense, Bishop demonstrates her awareness of the limitations imposed on her by only representing nature or the exuberance of her surroundings, and she tries exploring these questions in poetical writing. Years after her arrival in Brazil, in one of her drafts for a poem titled "Rainy Day, Rio" (which was never published but is now collected by Alice Quinn), Bishop attempts to articulate the almost overwhelming impression nature makes upon her:

Mountains should really not protrude

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[10] See my quotation on page 94 for Bishop's comments in her interview to Ashley Brown.

In city streets and brandish trees
At skyscrapers, nor should the seas
Roar at the business-man. So rude
Of Nature not to go away
But hang around the wondrous bay. (*EAP* 133)

Even if nature indeed occupies a primary position in Bishop's observing eye, the poet is aware of it as "obstructing" her view of other cultural elements, maybe even more "serious" or "engaging." Brazilian nature attracts her gaze, but at the same time its intensity overwhelms the poetical imagination, and these complexities are what will later form her poetical discussions in poems such as "Brazil, January 1, 1502" and "Questions of Travel." As discussed in the introduction to this work, in "Brazil, January 1, 1502," Bishop approximates the contemporary experience of arrival and exploration to other historical arrivals that have inevitably transformed and defined the Brazilian land.[11] In this context, the colonizer's or explorer's gaze is juxtaposed to the contemporary traveller's in their admiration of the spectacle of nature and in their literal attempts to conquer the unknown. The violence of the colonial encounter, with its "dream of wealth and luxury" (*CP* 92) is then re-visited in the contemporary encounter with the land, which also presents its own desires for the lush and exotic other.

Bishop re-reads the intricacies between contemporary and historical narratives in her letters and attempts to include them in later writing on Brazil as well, as her poems suggest. It is also interesting to note that this same idea is once more re-discussed in her Time-Life *Brazil*, published in conjunction with the editors of the series. Although she refers many times to this book with regret, arguing she did not feel it was "her writing" anymore, some of its discussions indeed dialogue with her own interests in the country, such as its historical connections.[12] In its first chapter, when discussing the growth of the Brazilian population despite some of the hardships it faces (particularly referring to infant mortality), Bishop writes: "It is like the banana tree that grows everywhere in the country. Cut it back to a stump above ground, and in a matter of days it sends up a new shoot and starts unfolding new green leaves" (*Brazil* 11). In Bishop's comparison, people and nature intertwine, and she refers back to the image of the banana tree to further discuss her observations on Brazil as a "natural paradise" (*Brazil* 11). In Bishop's reading of the Brazilian land, "[g]reat resources have been squandered, but even greater ones are still there, waiting" (*Brazil* 11). It is significant to notice that nature appears again as one of the most impressive elements in Bishop's writing, seeming also a particular interest of its Time-Life editors who further discuss the country's resources in the chapter "The Slow Awakening of a Giant," and who even re-map the country's territory according to its major economical products (*Brazil* 72-73).[13] Such "foreign" interest does not go unnoticed by Bishop, though. In the book's second chapter she actually re-reads the country's historical background in relation to its natural imaginary. According to her,

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[11] See my discussion of "Brazil, January 1, 1502" in the introduction of this present work.

> a land called "Brasil" was a legend in Europe at least as early as the Ninth Century. Wherever it was, it was the place where *bresilium* came from, a wood obtained in trade with the Far East and much in demand for dyeing cloth red. [. . .] the first

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[12] Brett Millier also discusses Bishop's frustration with the process of writing the book in conjunction with the editors of Time-Life. According to him, "[h]er growing hatred of the book she felt she was being forced to write and her dislike of the people doing the forcing made the task an utterly ungratifying one. In the end, her only sense of triumph came from finishing the book and managing to preserve most of the first three chapters of her prose intact" (326).

[13] According to Millier, "Elizabeth's interest in flora and fauna conflicted with Time's professed interest in 'people' and 'politics' [. . .] [Time's] interest in 'nature' extended only to exportable natural resources—Brazil's vast, untapped mineral wealth; rubber from Amazonas; the potential for large-scale cattle raising on the high plains" (325).

> European ships that were sent back from the continent of South America were loaded with brazilwood, and "Brazil," or "Brasil," became the common name for the new country. (*Brazil* 25-26)

In further reflecting on the representation of the country in the colonial imaginary, Bishop adds:

> on the first maps [the country's name] is either "Brazil" or "Land of Parrots." [. . .] On a world map published in Europe the year after Cabral's return [. . .], the coastline of Brazil is not much more than a guess, but Caminha's groves of trees are there, lined up as formally as in a Portuguese garden, and under them sits a group of giant macaws, presumably to give explorers some idea of what to expect. (*Brazil* 26)

Bishop's recovery of the colonial imaginary on Brazil once more contrasts to her own writing on the land, demonstrating her awareness of a recurrent paradox in re-inscriptions of the country as a wondrous natural resource. Her letter-writing allows her to further explore how her own representation of the country is not free from an impulse to "re-colonize" its nature, an impulse she later re-works in a book such as *Brazil*. Moreover, it seems that through a re-reading of the country's historical past she challenges this same impulse.[14]

Besides nature, Bishop's letters also include experimentations with writing about Brazilian people and culture. Probably due to her position in Samambaia, experiencing "Braziliannes" through her and Lota's household surroundings, Bishop's approach to the Brazilian people and their culture is also contradictory and ambiguous. Even if she was completely delighted with the warmth of the Brazilians around her (both Lota's friends and the people who worked for them), she also demonstrated a lack of patience or awareness towards what she considered Brazil's "primitiveness" or "backwardness." One of her letters from 1954 to Ilse and Kit Barker exemplifies her contradictory and dubious approach to the country, which attracts her for its beauty but also frustrates her for some of its cultural "character." She starts by complaining about the people's lack of education and understanding (particularly the people who work for them): "no one *ever* learns *anything*, and a habit is unheard of [. . .]. Sometimes one gets awfully tired of primitive people, I must confess" (*OA* 290). Yet, there are some elements of this relation that intrigue her: "There is a really pleasant intimacy with the people who work for you and Brazil is by far the most 'democratic' place I've ever seen, in some ways—but nobody knows how to do *anything* well, and nobody has the slightest sense of 'style'" (*OA* 290). In her judgments of the Brazilian people (particularly labourers), Bishop also imposes her own demands on the other, creating a sense of inefficiency which perpetrates certain stereotypes about South American cultures. At the same time, she is attached to the country's cultural elements, since more intimate and "democratic" (probably in the sense of accepting) than her own cultural background. Later in this same letter, she presents another contrasting point in both South and North American cultures: "We've been hearing the *sambas* for this year's Carnival. They make a new batch every year, all the samba clubs, and sometimes they are terribly clever. Their political wit and love-affair wit here is better than ours, I think, but the Latin approach to LIFE in general is much more serious—less self-conscious, I suppose" (*OA* 291). It is interesting to perceive that the same cultural element of "lack of education" or "primitiveness," criticized at the beginning of the letter, is reversed to cleverness and wit in the second half (particularly considering that the samba is a popular form of artistic expression of the mass culture). This ambiguity permeates much of Bishop's interest in the culture, and her fascination with the country and its customs, even if she is not necessarily able to reconcile both. Her Brazil, in her own words, "*is* beautiful, and strange" (*OA* 292).[15]

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[14] For a discussion on how Bishop reflects on colonial legacies in her translations of Brazilian works see Marilyn May Lombardi's chapter "'Travelling through the Flesh:' A Poetics of Translation" in *The Body and the Song: Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics*, 136-164.

The sense of ambivalence in approaching the country is a constant element in Bishop's letter-writing on Brazil. Other examples of these attempts to locate her other include classifying the people around her as "primitive," as the Samambaia cook, whom she defines as "half-savage and very dirty" (*OA* 243), but she also criticizes North Americans or Europeans who visit Brazil and "talk down to people," as she comments in a letter to James Merril (*OA* 303). She also use clichéd language to describe the Brazilian people: "I think they all are slightly crazy sometimes (the cliché remark about Brazilians)" (*OA* 265), but she was also aware of foreign visitors who only complain of the country, such as the North American couple who rents Lota's apartment in Rio in 1954 (*OA* 286). Such contradictory approaches could be partially "explained" by Bishop's attempts at re-reading a colonial paradigm that would still inform her perception of life in Brazil, and even her life with Lota. As a member of the Brazilian elite, Lota was educated in Europe, and carried with her much of the colonial frame of mind that would look at Europe or North America as centres of excellence in the production of goods and culture per se. In one of her letters from 1953, Bishop comments on Lota's obsession with things "well-made:"

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[15] This paradoxical approach to the Brazilian culture is once more revisited in the Times-Life *Brazil*, reflected even in its first chapter title "A Warm and Reasonable People." Later in the chapter, Bishop also writes: "Exploding birth rate and high infant mortality rate, great wealth and degrading poverty—these are the two big paradoxes. But along with them come many smaller ones repeating the pattern, overlapping and interacting: passionate patriotism combined with constant self-criticism and denigration; luxury and idleness (or admiration of them) combined with bursts of energy; extravagance and pride, with sobriety and humility" (11). In writing moments such as this, Bishop seems to be imposing on the country her own ambivalences and inability to reconcile what she thinks of it. See also Almeida's discussion of P.K. Page's approach to Brazil in the next chapter.

> Lota is extremely pro-English & I've at last begun to understand it better. I hadn't realized how England really ran Brazil all through the 19th century. When I knew Lota in N.Y. even, I noticed how she constantly spoke of things being "well-made," "well-finished" or "beautifully tailored," etc.—and now after living here I see how everything is wretchedly made, unfinished, and that for so long only the rich with good taste could have anything better, and of course then it was always English. The same thing is true of looks. I think I take it for granted that my friends are handsome, their babies are pretty, etc.—but here there almost seems to be an obsession with looks—everyone describes children's eyes and noses and chins endlessly—and when I see them I'm often disappointed. But the general level of looks is rather low, I'm afraid—and the ugliness of the "poor people"—I don't know how to call them—is *appalling*. *Nobody* seems "well-made," except some of the Negroes. (*OA* 258)

Through comments such as this, one perceives Bishop's attempts at trying to elaborate on the colonial paradigm and its legacies, which still inform much of the contemporary Brazil she lives in, experimenting with a more historical approach to the country, even if she does not seem completely in control of her "conclusions" about it. She demonstrates her awareness in relation to Lota's investment in a perpetuation of a colonial or neo-colonial system, but does not necessarily discuss it more than superficially, as if excusing not only Lota's preferences for everything "foreign," since "well-made," but her own demands on the Brazilian beauty (or better, ugliness) from a North American perspective. Without accounting for the still prevailing colonial approach to miscegenation that defined much of the race politics of the country, in this particular letter Bishop misrecognizes her Brazilian other by what she sees as "ugliness" or "wretchedness," further perpetuating a sense of colonial superiority over the barbarous tropical other.[16] In this sense, much of Bishop's representations of Brazil in her letters can be seen as filtered by her negotiations between her perceptions and observations of social, economic and cultural aspects of life in the country and the North American (or foreign) demands and preconceptions that perpetrate a stereotypical view of the other still based on colonial discoveries and definitions of the tropics as "backward," "underdeveloped" or "primitive."[17] Also, her alliances with the *carioca* elite of the 1950s lead her to have a very particular experience of the country which does not necessarily represent the different political and economic paradigms present in Brazil at the time.

According to some Brazilian critics such as Paulo H. Britto, for example, Bishop's explorations of Brazil in her letters further alienate the Brazilian culture from a North American audience by constantly presenting it as "nature" in opposition to the U.S. as "culture" (2). Britto emphasizes Bishop's look at the "backwardness" and primitivism of the country, looking at nature as exuberant and at the people as primitives, living in poor social conditions, enclosing Brazil as the other who should be "civilized" or "domesticated" by the North American traveller. For Britto, since Bishop reads Brazil through the microcosm of Samambaia, her cultural alliances lead her to failure in her intercultural mediations, since they are "a succession of misunderstandings, large and small" (8). Britto's approach to Bishop's representations of the country is indeed relevant for a more disingenuous and engaged reading of the poet's exploratory writing in her letters about Brazil, and I agree that such writing can be seen as a re-inscription of Brazil as a primitive and backward space, and that she does seem to "take advantage" (or *aproveitar*, a verb she actually learns in Brazil and likes using) of her situation in Brazil.[18] In a letter from 1953, for example, Bishop writes: "You should see our 'yard' now—three English cars, all the finest, sitting in it, and why the workmen on the house don't murder us all as dirty capitalists I don't know" (*OA* 273).

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[16] For a further discussion on Bishop and race, see: Renée R. Curry, *White Women Writing White: H.D., Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath, and Whiteness* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000).

[17] In *Amazon Town*, for example, a book Bishop read and used in the construction of her poem "The Riverman," Charles Wagley discusses about ethnological texts he defined as "tropical racists," since they would argue that "living in the tropics actually leads to human degeneration" (6). It is indeed significant to note that Wegley's first chapter of his book is titled "The Problem of Man in the Tropics."

Nevertheless, it also seems that Bishop's investigations and representations of Brazil go much further than simply repeating a dichotomous discourse of North America (particularly the U.S.) as civilized and privileged and South America (particularly Brazil) as barbarous and uncivilized. As Victoria Harrison points out, as "Bishop became settled into a daily life [in Brazil] [. . .] she began to seek ways to define her often clashing impressions" (146), impressions that, as I read them, are explored in her letter-writing and then transformed into a more challenging questioning in her poetical writing. One of Bishop's ways to define or negotiate such clashing impressions of Brazil is through her re-reading of the colonial paradox and its legacies in the so-called "backwardness" of Brazil. In one of her letters from 1953, when talking about some of the people who work at Samambaia, Bishop says: "Lota just told me that a little boy who is helping Paulo has a 'very good old Portuguese name.' It turns out to be *Magellan*. It's funny how in this undeveloped-yet-decadent country one feels so much closer to the past than one ever could in the U.S.A" (*OA* 271). Again, the reading of the other through her preconceptions regarding civilization and modernity is evident in Bishop's comments about the "underdevelopment" and "decadence" of Brazil. Yet, there is something in it that actually catches the poet's attention and reconnects her to the land. The idea of feeling closer to the past creates a possible window for the reaching out to the Brazilian difference – instead of more "separateness" between self and other, there is a reconnection with a historical and colonial past, not necessarily available to her in her U.S. environment. It seems that in the interstitial space of past and present, or in the space between what she defines as backwardness and modernity found in cities such as Rio de Janeiro or Petrópolis that she finds a place to read Brazilian historical legacies and to re-connect with the Brazilian other.

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[18] In a letter from 1956, Bishop writes: "There's a nice Portuguese word meaning to make the most of or to take advantage—*aproveitar*—and we've been *aproveitar*-ing shamelessly" (324). In the letter, Bishop is referring specifically about *aproveitar* the visit of a friend who has a "fiend for 'altering' clothes" (324).

In this context, the significance of Bishop's inability to complete any formal poetical writing on Brazil for the first years she is in the country is intensified by the fact that it is also at this moment (maybe a moment of reconnection with the past) that she re-discovers her own past in Nova Scotia. As many critics have already pointed out, during Bishop's first years in Brazil, her formal poetical writing, instead of focusing on her Brazilian surroundings, goes back in time, exploring her childhood in Nova Scotia. For Lorrie Goldensohn, this childhood awakening was enabled by Bishop's re-reading of Brazil's "backwardness." According to the critic,

> In a variety of texts, Bishop's travel to South America performed what Lévi-Strauss described as the time-twist inherent in such travel: 'The tropics are not so much exotic as out-of-date," he declared in *Tristes Tropiques*, a book Bishop read while in Brazil. [. . .] While usually avoiding the patronizing judgement about equatorial

> progress, with its corresponding binary trap defining one country as temperate-advanced and the other as tropical-regressed, Bishop did share the sense of sliding temporarily. But feeling floods her style, so that her temporal reversal, or her fascination with the primitive, becomes in part an assumption of a childhood perspective with a liberating and adaptive force. (7)

It seems that Goldensohn approaches Bishop's reading of her Brazilian surroundings through the possibility this space offers her to reconnect with her childhood emotions and feelings since "sliding temporarily" in the Brazilian "backwardness." Indeed, the "passing of time" is one of Bishop's great interests in relation to writing and perspective and Brazil offers her an opportunity to reflect on such questions. Instead of looking at such re-discovery of her Nova Scotia past as only "an assumption of childhood perspective," I also look at it as Bishop's attempts to reconcile the idea of how to recover historical time in the ever-changing moment of representation. The intangibility of the past (both historical and private) becomes compared to the idea of the intangibility of a "complete comprehension" (*CP* 89) of the other's difference. Yet, it is in the reading of time (or in her reading of historical legacies, continuously manifesting in the present) that Bishop finds a way to read her Brazilian surroundings, also creating a point of connection for her own self in such a space.[19]

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[19] Although my reading of Bishop's writing on Brazil also raises the question of history, it differs from Thomas J. Travisano's reading of it in *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Artistic Development*. This critic reads what he calls Bishop's "later phase" as "history," including his reading of Bishop's *Questions of Travel* on it. Despite the fact that my reading goes along the lines of Travisano's discussion of Bishop's writing on Brazil as "successfully evok[ing] the historically conditional sensibility of those living in a place, as well as how the place has been shaped by its inhabitants" (141), I do not look at her writing as impersonal (134). On the contrary, my interest in looking at Bishop's re-readings of the historical discourse is to discuss how she sees the subject as continuously changing and changed by it, leading the poet to actually re-discover her own position in the geographical spaces she occupies.

And the "compass still points north:" Bishop's Nova Scotia Writing in Brazil

My New England blood tells me that no, it isn't true. Escape does not work; if you really are happy you should just naturally go to pieces and never write a line—but apparently that—and most psychological theories on the subject, too—is all wrong. And that in itself is a great help.
[. . .]
It is funny to come to Brazil to experience total recall about Nova Scotia—geography must be more mysterious than we realize, even.
Elizabeth Bishop's letter to Kit and Ilse Barker
October 12, 1952

Bishop's comments in her letter to Kit and Ilse Barker demonstrate her awareness about certain expectations regarding the idea of escapism and exile associated with travel. At the same time she seems interested in the "theories" about this subject, she is even more interested in creating a connection (even if forged) between North and South geographical or imagined locations. Despite the unfamiliar space Brazil represents, mainly in relation to its natural surroundings, its culture, and its people, Bishop "settles down" in the new place, with a routine she describes as "living here very happily in the country and working [. . .] –and managing the kitchen part of the house-keeping" (*OA* 305). The house that both she and Lota live in, despite its modern architecture and carefully designed construction patterns, also leads their inhabitants to live in an "outdated" or "un-modern" life style. Since their house was under construction, they did not have some of the comforts of "modernity," such as electric light or heating, and they were somewhat isolated from the city, which would also give the poet a sense of being distanced from the "real" world. In this environment, a mixture of modern and old-fashioned life, Bishop's memories of Nova Scotia start to be articulated in her poetical writing, and they allow her to create a Brazilian imagined space in which she could feel she "belonged."

Criticism has tried to locate Bishop's writing on Nova Scotia from different perspectives. According to Lorrie Goldensohn, the contradictions of Bishop's life in Samambaia lead her to a more effective reading of the contradictions of her own childhood. For this critic, Bishop's experience in Brazil can be seen as a reconciliation of the two "worlds" of her childhood: the Nova Scotia country world of her maternal grandparents, with its warmth, love and simplicity, and the world of her paternal grandparents, with its economic affluence and coldness (12). Also, for Goldensohn, in Bishop's Brazilian home "archaism and modernity, intimacy and sophistication, the manners of both luxury and poverty, the exotic, the familiar, the autonomous and the familial, are all inimical pairs disarmingly blended" (13). In this sense, Bishop's return to Nova Scotia in her writing is seen as "ignited" by the kind of life she is leading in Samambaia, or, in other words, as mirroring her childhood memories in the Brazilian surroundings.

Many other critics, albeit from different perspectives, also approach Bishop's Nova Scotia writing in Brazil as a recovering of the domesticity of her childhood memories. For Lloyd Schwartz, for example, "Brazil may have been the closest thing to a real home that Bishop ever found after her paternal grandparents removed her from Nova Scotia" ("Annals of Poetry" 90). In this context, both Brazil and Nova Scotia are read from a point of view of Bishop's affection to a certain period of her life, leading her to collapse self and other in the interstitial space her home with Lota creates.[20] Such connections can also be approached as Bishop's way to build some "familiarity" in the unfamiliar space Brazil opens to her. In a slightly different line of thought, Steven G. Axelrod argues that it is due to Bishop's apparent detachment in her experience of her

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[20] See also Harrison 109.

Brazilian other that she is able to read her past in Nova Scotia, from which she had also tried to keep safely distanced throughout her life. For Axelrod, even when Bishop tried writing about her past before Brazil, she would keep a "safe distance" from it, as poems such as "Cape Breton" demonstrate. Yet, once in Brazil, she finds herself in what Axelrod sees as a protected and safe environment to enter the houses of her childhood memories (283). Through her encounter with a completely different and remote landscape, Bishop is able to recover some of her own private stories.

Despite the many insightful elements present in these approaches to Bishop's Nova Scotia writing in Brazil, they tend to overemphasize the traumatic aspects of her childhood and the fact that her house with Lota in Petrópolis would be a reconstitution of the feeling of home she had as a child in the company of her maternal grandparents. Another possible way of reading Bishop's Nova Scotia writing is related to the kinds of unexpected recognitions her travels to South America open to her – the recognition of the presence of the past (or the question of time). Through Bishop's perception of Brazil as a space one feels "closer to the past," and through her attentive observations on the question of time, the poet recognizes how her own past "still hangs over her" (borrowing one of her expressions from her story "In the Village"). It is this "haunting of the past" (this uncanny presence of a personal and historical past) that informs much of Bishop's poetical writing in Brazil.

The two Nova Scotia stories Bishop writes as soon as she arrives in Brazil, "Gwendolyn" and "In the Village" (both published in the *New Yorker* in the early 1950s), present efforts to negotiate present and past. Much has already been said on how these stories embody Bishop's attempts to deal with the many losses of her life, particularly the loss of her mother.[21] On the other hand, such narratives seem to give Bishop an opportunity to reflect not only on the question of "losing" but on the question of "keeping" (or, in other words, on the question of how to reconstitute time lost). In this context, I see Bishop's stories as also discussing how the childhood survives in the present or how they deal with the "hanging" presence of what *has been*, which, despite intangible, can be approached by its legacies or by bits of memory, which are inevitably moulding our own readings of the present.

In "Gwendolyn," for example, besides the evident interest of the child-narrator in recounting a pivotal moment of her childhood – the story of her friend's death – and how she coped with it, there are many passages related to how "loss" or time passed is revisited through actual or imagined recoveries. The very beginning of the story presents some examples of such reconnections with time: from the recovery of the "hidden" and fragile doll (whose name had been forgotten) rescued from the "bottom bureau drawer" of Aunt Mary's room (*CPr* 213), to the "interesting" scrap bag (*CPr* 214), which allows the child-narrator to identify scrap pieces of cloth to actual dresses being used by her grandmother, to the "best entertainment of all" (*CPr* 214), the crazy quilt, in which the child can read names of people from "long before" whose stories are told and re-told by the grandmother (*CPr* 214-15). Through some of these "recoveries," the child seems to play with the transitory nature of the passage of time, only accessible through scraps or tangible pieces of multifaceted cloth. The whole narrative of Gwendolyn's "ephemeral" life is also one of the main aspects of the story, and the exaggerated sweet treatment she receives from her parents translates the anxieties brought by the impossibility of keeping time unchanged – a realization that culminates in the child's hearing of Gwendolyn's words: "because I'm going to die" (*CPr* 220). The ending of the narrative is significant as well. In it, the child-narrator describes how she dares to recover the prohibited Aunt Mary's doll to play with her cousin, and how, in their "adorning her with flowers" (*CPr* 226), they realize they are reconstituting Gwendolyn's funeral: "I don't know which one of us said it first, but one of us did, with wild joy—that it was Gwendolyn's funeral, and that the doll's name, all this time, was Gwendolyn" (*CPr* 226). This particular moment of recognition, of how the past "invades" the present even in the most unexpected moments, becomes the "haunting" element of Bishop's narrative. Yet, as the narrator realizes, this recovery of the past in the present is also transitory, since it is at the very moment of renaming the doll that the grandparents arrive, interrupting their play.

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[21] See also Travisano 131-174 and Harrison 107-141.

"In the Village" is even more strongly connected to the presence of past memories, showing the complexities of Bishop's thinking on this issue. In this story, Bishop attempts to create a link in her narrative of time that, even if not necessarily collapsing the past into the present, reveals its legacies and continuities. It seems that even Bishop herself realizes the story significantly plays with the passing of time. In one of her letters to Kit and Ilse Barker (March 1953), she comments on how the editors of *The New Yorker* were having difficulties in "following" the story: "I am thinking of trying to send you a story I am having trouble with *The New Yorker* about—they don't follow it or something. I'd like to see if you do" (*OA* 259). "In the Village" once again recovers some moments of her childhood, particularly some of the last memories Bishop had of her mother living with her at her grandparents' home. The childhood scenes remembered in the story are all connected to a particular moment in her mother's life, when she is fitting a new dress, purple, finally leaving her "mourning dresses" behind. Yet, as the story tells us, the mother "wasn't at all sure whether she was going to like the dress or not" (*CPr* 251-252). For her, the "dress was all wrong. She screamed" (*CPr* 253). The story actually opens with the uncanny presence of this scream, which still resounds in the child's (and even the adult's) ears. The first lines of the story read: "A scream, the echo of a scream, hangs over that Nova Scotian village. No one hears it; it hangs there forever, a slight stain in those pure blue skies" (*CPr* 251). This scream, in direct juxtaposition to the setting of the village, insists in its presence: "The scream hangs like that, unheard, in memory—in the past, in the present, and those years between. It was not even loud to begin with, perhaps. It just came there to live, forever—not loud, just alive forever" (*CPr* 251). Also, the scream's continuity, more than enclosed in the child's memories, assumes a quality of "atemporality" and tangibility since "[f]lick the lightning rod on top of the church steeple with your fingernail and you will hear it" (*CPr* 251). The tone of the opening narrative and its third-person point of view lead us to see this scream as more than an individual memory, but as part of this village's history. In an individual level, maybe as the ultimate marker of separation between the child and the distressed mother who never really recovered from her husband's death, the scream echoes in the past but its legacies are still felt in the present, even if the child's memories also insist in muffling its sound with the "[c]lang. Clang" of the blacksmith's shop (*CPr* 252). Other elements of connection between what *has been* and what *is* are represented in the story, such as the mother's belongings and the memories of her activities, the grandmother's tears, and the child's overhearing of the mother's disturbances. It is in the juxtaposition of the blacksmith's noise, which is "pure" and "neutral," and the mother's scream that the child seems to find a balance in her experience. The ending of the narrative once more questions the transitory nature of what is perceived and lived:

> Now there is no scream. Once there was one and it settled slowly down to earth one hot summer afternoon; or did it float up, into that dark, too dark, blue sky? But surely it has gone away, forever.
>
> It sounds like a bell buoy out at sea.
>
> It is the elements speaking: earth, air, fire, water.
>
> All those other things—clothes, crumbling postcards, broken china; things damaged and lost, sickened or destroyed; even the frail almost-lost scream—are they too frail for us to hear their voices long, too mortal? (*CPr* 274)

The powerfulness of the scream lies in its transcendence. More than the fragility of tangible but transitory things (as broken china), the scream lives forever as the elements that speak to us and are essential to survival. Bishop seems to find a way into her Brazilian experience in these connections between the surviving nature of past stories. The "elements of the past" she recognizes in her Brazilian surroundings (such as the boy's name – Magellan), will also lead her back to a re-discovery of the "hanging" presence of Brazilian history.

Another significant aspect of Bishop's writing on her Nova Scotia past during her first years in Brazil is that it is also at this time that she starts to get really involved with the reading and translation of the Brazilian book *Minha Vida de Menina* (literally 'My Life as a Young Girl,' which was translated as *The Diary of Helena Morley*).[22] Some critics argue that Bishop's recoveries of her childhood memories are related to her interest in the Brazilian book, which is an actual diary of a Brazilian girl written at the end of the nineteenth century. As Bishop comments in her introduction to her translated edition, she started reading it after asking friends for suggestions of Brazilian books she should read. Among the Brazilian classics (such as works by Machado de Assis and Euclides da Cunha) they suggested the diary, a book that had become unexpectedly famous in Brazil (particularly in the Rio de Janeiro region). Its author wrote it when she was a teenage girl, and at the time Bishop reads it, the author is already a grandmother. After she starts reading the book, Bishop becomes immediately attached to it, and she even confesses in her introduction that the "more I read the book the better I liked it" (*CPr* 82). One of the main intriguing characteristics of the narrative, for Bishop, is that this book "is not reminiscences; it is a diary actually kept by a girl between the ages of twelve and fifteen, in the far-off town of Diamantina, in 1893-1895" (*CPr* 81). Thus, its "actuality" and "spontaneity" captivate Bishop, who does not tire of reaffirming that "*it really happened*; everything did take place, day by day, minute by minute, once and only once, just the way Helena says it did [. . .] in a town financially ruined by the emancipation of the slaves and the opening of the Kimberly diamond mines (*CPr* 100). Diamantina, a mining town in the state of Minas Gerais, is a changing town at the end of the nineteenth century, mainly due to its economic transformations, as Bishop points out. Yet, its "character" is portrayed in Helena Morley's diary, making it freshly approachable to future generations. Bishop once more has the opportunity to explore (mainly through her translation of the book) the collapse between representation and actuality in the recreation of a world that *has been* and *is changing*, but which is rescued and recovered at the moment it is narrated.

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[22] Edition consulted: Alice Dayrell Brant. *The Diary of Helena Morley*, trans. Elizabeth Bishop. (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1958).

Moreover, the fact that Bishop decides to translate the book and publishes it much before than most of her works on Brazil is very revealing. According to Victoria Harrison, Bishop's writing on Brazil becomes poignantly engaging when her own voice meets Brazilian voices that dialogue with her representation of difference, and for the critic, this "meeting ground is perhaps most evident in her translations" (173). For Harrison, Bishop's translations of Brazilian literary works allow her to deeply explore the culture and its nuances, and "especially in the case of the Diary, [it meant] embracing an entire world, immersing herself in a culture and language not her own and [. . .] making it hers" (174). In this sense, the translation of the diary enables Bishop to dive not only in Helena's childhood world, with its spontaneity, creativity, and literalness, but also into the Brazilian culture, or better, into some of its aspects that "survived" (in the diary) the many changes in the social, economical, and political scenarios of the country. For Lloyd Schwartz, by "[t]ranslating the diary Bishop also created for herself a new, Brazilian past" ("Elizabeth Bishop's Diary" 288), allowing her to reconnect with her new surroundings, particularly due to the fact that she recognizes, in this colonial town, many characteristics present in her Nova Scotia village. Thus, in this interstitial space of translating Helena's Brazil and her own childhood in writing, Bishop creates a point of encounter between her past self and her present experience in Brazil.

Also, looking at the diary as a seemingly "capsule" to the past allows Bishop to explore some of the characteristics that are still present in her daily life in Brazil. This "ever presence" is better translated in her own definitions of the diary in her introduction: "[t]he scenes and events [the diary] described were odd, remote, and long ago, and yet fresh, sad, funny, and eternally true" (*CPr* 82). Bishop perceives the presence, in writing, of a moment not yet changed, and that can be reconstituted in the new experiences of the town of Diamantina. In a note to a new edition of the diary's translation in 1977, Bishop writes:

> I have not been back to Diamantina, nor have I ever really wanted to go back. Remote, sad, and impoverished as it was, I liked the little town very much, perhaps because it seemed so close to the Diamantina of Helena's childhood, the writing coming off the pages of her diary, and turning to life again, as it had happened. I am superstitious about going "back" to places, anyway: they have changed; you have changed; even the weather may have changed. I am glad to see Helena's youthful book appear again; both it and my memories of Diamantina remain, as I'm afraid I said once before, in the earlier Introduction, still "as fresh as paint." (*CPr* 109)

Her recognition of the "writing" becoming real again in the actuality of the city is immediately destabilized by her avoiding the return to Diamantina, being afraid things could have changed. The struggle between feeling the presence of the past but also recognizing the inevitability of change appeals to Bishop. How does one represent, in poetical writing, the changing and changed aspect of time, particularly if related to one's own past?

Such qualities are discussed in some other Nova Scotia writing she completes in her first decade in Brazil, such as the poems "Manners," "Sestina," and "First Death in Nova Scotia." These poems also present the transitory nature of time and how certain elements insist in "surviving" (even if only in one's memory). "Manners," for example, presents the grandfather's insistence in a particular set of habits (his politeness) even in a changing and modernizing world, where the speaker recognizes that "automobiles went by, the dust hid the people's faces, / but we shouted 'Good day! Good day! / Fine day!' at the top of our voices" (*CP* 121). In "Sestina," it is the grandmother's tears that do not go away and invade the child's perception of her home, her almanac and even her drawings: "*Time to plant tears*, says the almanac. / The grandmother sings to the marvellous stove / and the child draws another inscrutable house" (*CP* 124). In "First Death in Nova Scotia," time stopped in death is once more revisited, and its qualities seem to be revived in the coldness or freezing of the landscape, in which the speaker's cousin Arthur is laid down beneath other frozen and immutable elements, such as the chromographs of the British Royal Family and the stuffed loon. All these poems deal with the question of a time past, which still informs the poet's present in her imaginary between different geographical locations that interlock in her poetical writing.

In a story first drafted in 1959, "Memories of Uncle Neddy," Bishop attempts to more deeply reflect on the connections between North and South America. The story presents some of Bishop's reflections on her uncle's life, ignited by her observations of his portrait. This portrait was sent by his widow, "Aunt Hat," who, in Bishop's words, "shipped him thousands of miles from Nova Scotia, along with one of his younger sisters, my mother" (*CPr* 229). Bishop's comments on the portraits are juxtaposed to descriptions of her mildewed apartment in the rainy Rio de Janeiro, a narrative technique that can be read as her attempt to collapse the two geographical locations that are occupying her poetical imagination at the time. The story opens with a description of location – the rainy Rio: "It's raining in Rio de Janeiro, raining, raining, raining. This morning the papers said it is the rainiest rainy season in seventy six years. [. . .] If the rain keeps up much longer the radio will stop working again and the hi-fi will rust beyond repair" (*CPr* 227). Soon, after a paragraph on location, the focus changes to the portrait:

> And Uncle Neddy, that is, my Uncle Edward, is *here*. Into this wild foreign and, to him, exotic setting, Uncle Neddy has just come back, from the framer's. He leans slightly, silently backwards against the damp-stained pale-yellow wall, looking quite cheerfully into the eyes of whoever happens to look at him—including the cat's, who investigated him just now. (*CPr* 228)

Bishop's explorations of the connections between this uncle's life and her Brazilian surroundings go on in her discussions of moulds and mildews, and how a particular kind of mould reminds her of him since, in the speaker's words: "he represented 'the devil' for me, not a violent, active Devil, but a gentle black one, a devil of weakness, acquiescence, tentatively black, like the sooty mildew" (*CPr* 228). As if interested in further reflecting on this uncle's characteristics, at this moment of the narrative the focus of attention is only on the recovery of her uncle's story in Nova Scotia. The connections between both geographical locations only return at the end of the narrative, but instead of attempting to fuse both spaces once more, as the speaker's descriptions do in the beginning with the reflections on the mildew, at the end, there is a more marked sense of separation and estrangement:

> I don't believe that Uncle Neddy ever went anywhere in his life except possibly two or three times as far as Boston [. . .]. And now he is here, on the other side of the Equator, with his little sister [. . .].
>
> In spite of the heat and dampness, they look calmly on and on, at the invisible Tropic of Capricorn, at the extravagant rain still blotting out the southern ocean. I

> must watch out for the mildew that inevitably forms on old canvases in the rainy season, and wipe them off often. [. . .] Uncle Neddy will continue to exchange his direct, bright-hazel, child's looks, now, with those of strangers—dark-eyed Latins he never knew, who never would have understood him, whom he would have thought of, if he had ever thought of them at all, as "foreigners." How late, Uncle Neddy, how late to have started on your travels! (*CPr* 250)

The forged connection or the exchange between Uncle Neddy's eyes and "those of strangers" seem to mark the impossibility of a real (or further) dialogue between these two spatial backgrounds, even if the uncle's portrait does not have any other choice besides being hanged in the Brazilian apartment. The speaker-narrator realizes the "forced" connection, but seems also willing to raise a possibility of contact: differently from her uncle, the narrator has not waited too long to start on her own travels. As Axelrod reminds us, in Bishop's writing in Brazil, she "wished to unsettle binaries such as those of imagination and perception, poetry and prose, homelike and unhomelike, here and there" (288). In the space of such unsettling moments, particularly the ones related to the uncanny presence of the past, she presents her reflections on both North and South Americas.

In this context, Bishop's letters and her Nova Scotia writing attempt to re-establish a connection between North and South imaginaries. Her letters become moments of exploration of the Brazilian surroundings, reflecting on her other and sending news from South to North. Also, her writing on Nova Scotia flourishes once more in Brazil, and with renewed energy. In the new space Brazil creates for her, Bishop re-discovers aspects of her own past, exploring herself and her new environment, and elaborating on questions about identity. In the unexpectedness of the South American country she creates a connection. Yet, little by little, her images on the Brazilian other start to be formed in her poetry as well. These poetical reflections are, then, the main focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 3 – *Questions of Travel* and Other Poetical Considerations: Bishop's Writing on Brazil

[. . .] For a later
era will differ.
(O difference that kills,
or intimidates, much
of all our small shadowy
life!)"
Song for the Rainy Season, Elizabeth Bishop

If Bishop's letters and her Nova Scotia writing allow the poet to experiment with some blurring of boundaries between time and space, her poetry on Brazil carefully considers her observations on the new surroundings. Her third book of poems, *Questions of Travel*, rests on the paradox of the boundary between its two sections, "Brazil" and "Elsewhere," with the Brazil section opening with "Arrival at Santos" and the Elsewhere section opening with "In the Village" – two pieces that significantly mark the ordering of experience and representation involved in her writing in Brazil. The poems from the Brazil section were composed mostly between the second half of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, but they are not necessarily chronologically ordered in the book. "In the Village" marks an attempted connection between the Brazilian and the North American imaginary in the two sections of the book; yet its position also divides these two spaces, since it is located in the very middle of the two blocks of writing. So, even if the book as a whole may give an impression of the intermingling of North and South geographical locations, there is still an unspoken boundary between the two destinations, which is constantly being challenged and re-discovered in *Questions of Travel*.

In fact, one can say that Bishop's third book of poems re-maps not only the borders between "Brazil" and "Elsewhere" but also other frontiers and spaces of cultural encounters. "Arrival at Santos," for example, as the opening poem of this collection, presents a significant marker of border-crossing, and the force of its final verse "we are driving to the interior" (*CP* 90) foretells two paradoxical but interdependent actions in the whole book: the driving towards otherness – the interior of the travelled space – and the driving towards one's own boundaries – the interior of the self. As expected, these "drivings" overlap. In this sense, positioning this first poem as a literal and metaphorical arrival (both in another country, and also in another first-page of a book) opens up the possibility for a new reading of the traveller's re-discoveries of her destination (be it Nova Scotia, Brazil, or the United States). In this reading, the relations between self and other, observer and observed, traveller and travelled destination are further explored and questioned.

The first borders explored in the Brazil section of the book are the ones pertaining to the nature of travel per se. As some critics have already pointed out, mainly following David Kalstone's suggestion, the first three Brazil poems of Bishop's book ("Arrival at Santos," "Brazil, January 1, 1502," and "Questions of Travel") could be read as a triptych in which different approaches to travelling and encountering the other are explored. According to Kalstone, "[t]he first three poems are explicitly poems of method, shucking off habitual notions of culture and history" since "[d]iscomfort and disorientation [. . .] undermine habit" (214). For this critic, through these first poems, Bishop works with the notion of the limits of understanding difference (214). In this line of thought, they demarcate new meanings for the idea of "driving to the interior," and also raise questions regarding the kinds of borders one crosses or the problematic involved in such crossing. While "Arrival as Santos" deals with the first impressions and demands imposed on the travelled space from a homebound point of view, "Brazil, January 1, 1502" discusses the violence involved in the acts of gazing, exploring and travelling into difference. The focus of both poems is on the positions of the observing travellers and how they impose or "act upon" their surroundings.[1] While this imposition is "mocked" and "frustrated" in "Arrival at Santos," in "Brazil, January 1, 1502," it is marked by the colonial doom, the violent destruction and appropriation of the other's "interiority." In both cases, such marks of imposition come from the traveller's attempts to control or dominate the experience of difference.

The poem "Questions of Travel" further explores such issues, but from a different perspective. As its own title suggests (particularly due to the fact it is also the title of Bishop's third book), the poem presents instants of reflection, questioning and negotiation involved in the acts of travelling and encountering difference. More than a mere imposition of understanding, this poem actually presents a variety of possibilities included in "driving to the interior." As Kim Fortuny argues, "Questions of Travel" discusses the possibilities and the unexpected recognitions of living in uncertainties (62-63), since "uncertainty can lead to knowledge when the traveller looks at the particulars of the world with the subtle eye of a would be artist" (63). In this context, the poem delves into a reflection not only on the nature of travel per se, but on the particular kind of travel writing Bishop's poetical imagination is committed to. The limits and possibilities of close observation are once more explored and expanded in the re-discoveries of the traveller in the travelled space. It allows the traveller to cross some of the boundaries that impede cultural recognitions.

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[1] Greenblatt 13.

Like the previous two first poems of the collection, "Questions of Travel" addresses the imposition of the traveller's look upon the travelled destination, and these impositions (or demands) are the point of departure in the poem:

> There are too many waterfalls here; the crowded streams
> hurry too rapidly down to the sea,
> and the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops
> makes them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion,
> turning to waterfalls under our very eyes.
> --For if those streaks, those mile-long, shiny, tearstains,
> aren't waterfalls yet, in a quick age or so, as ages go here,
> they probably will be.
> But if the streams and clouds keep traveling, traveling,
> the mountains look like the hulls of capsized ships,
> slime-hung and barnacled. (*CP* 93)

The tone of demand over the observed scenery echoes the tourist's perceptions in "Arrival at Santos" with its judgments and terms of comparisons: "too many," "too rapidly," and so on. There is a sense of rejection of such impossible (or "impractical") scenery, which tricks the observer's perception, transforming clouds into waterfalls "under our very eyes." The aside initiated by the dash seems an attempted rationalization of experience from the traveller's point of view: "even if they are not waterfalls now, they will be – probably;" and the choice of words reveals the uncertainty of the traveller who still attempts to control experience. Also, the three last verses of the stanza once more reflect the traveller's anxieties being imposed on landscape, as the imagery of travel and mobility contrasts to the end of travel and stagnation.

The "questions of travel" begin in this sense of confusion, or of not being necessarily sure of how to read a new surrounding. Instead of un-problematically accepting her own demands over the landscape, the traveller questions the act of travel per se, locating the position of the self as if in dialogue with an imaginary fellow traveller, and responding to a particular cultural context:

> Think of the long trip home.
> Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?
> Where should we be today?
> Is it right to be watching strangers in a play
> in this strangest of theatres?
> What childishness is it that while there's a breath of life
> in our bodies, we are determined to rush
> to see the sun the other way around?
> The tiniest green hummingbird in the world?
> To stare at some inexplicable old stonework,
> inexplicable and impenetrable,
> at any view,
> instantly seen and always, always delightful?
> Oh, must we dream our dreams
> and have them, too?

> And have we room
>
> for one more folded sunset, still quite warm? (*CP* 93)

The many questions that start inhabiting the traveller's imaginary appear when there is a reinsertion of the memory of "home." As if feeling obliged to look back, the idea of separation between the two "worlds" (home and away) is emphasized in the characterization of the "long trip home," a separation that immediately demands attention – "should we have stayed" there and only "though of" or imagined here? What is indeed the main difference between the actual travel and encounter with the other, and the imagination of such an encounter? Which one is "right," or more appropriate? Could the one who imagines be also co-opted by the questionable activity of "watching strangers in a play" since the inclusive "we" of the poem leads the reader to be viewed as also part of the production and consumption of travel representations? In this sense, the definition of travelling as "watching this strangest of theatres" speaks to the audience at home, and also recreates the binary logic of home and away, separating observer from observed and inserting the observed in an intangible and exotic frame. In these verses, there is no participation or interaction between traveller and travelled space. As if dramatizing, in the structure of this stanza, the spectacle of theatre itself, Bishop constructs a play that questions the action of "watching" or "seeing" – these verbs and their variations are used and repeated throughout the stanza. In this context, the speaker's questions address the kind of travel re-defined as "childish," since based on impulses that lead the traveller to look for entertainment in difference: "seeing the sun the other way around" or the "tiniest hummingbird." This is the kind of travel that presupposes the acts of "watching," "seeing," "staring," "viewing," and even if instantly, "admiring" the pleasures of such view with its “inexplicable and impenetrable” meanings. This stanza, then, performs the role of questioning the traveller’s “drive to the interior.” Also, as Kim Fortuny reminds us, in the last four verses of the stanza, “there is a suggestion [. . .] that there may be something sinful in all this aesthetic gluttony” (68). The stanza ends, then, with the speaker’s recognitions of her connections with the insatiable look of traveller-explorers, already discussed in the two first poems of the collection.

Nevertheless, the speaker of this third poem insists in her questions, and the third stanza announces further reflection: Is there more to travel than “watching” or “gazing” at the aesthetical difference of the other? Can there be instants of engagement between self and other instead of complete separation and misunderstanding? Unlike the kinds of “home-bound” questions asked in the second stanza, the third stanza characterizes the possibilities enabled by the unexpected and uncertain elements that are also part of travelling:

> But surely it would have been a pity
> not to have seen the trees along this road
> really exaggerated in their beauty,
> not to have seen them gesturing
> like noble pantomimists, robed in pink.
> --Not to have had to stop for gas and heard
> the sad, two-noted, wooden tune
> of disparate wooden clogs
> carelessly clacking over
> a grease-stained filling station floor.

(In another country the clogs would all be tested.
Each pair there would have identical pitch.)
--A pity not to have heard
the other, less primitive music of the fat brown bird
who sings above the broken gasoline pump
in a bamboo church of Jesuit baroque:
three towers, five silver crosses.
--Yes, a pity not to have pondered,
blurr'dly and inconclusively,
on what connection can exist for centuries
between the crudest wooden footwear
and, careful and finicky,
the whittled fantasies of wooden cages.
--Never to have studied history in
the weak calligraphy of songbirds' cages. (*CP* 93-94)

In this third stanza, the focus changes from the questioning to the affirmation of significant encounters with difference. There is no more pure "sightseeing," but there is also attention, participation, "perfectly useless concentration" (Bishop qtd. in Stevenson *Elizabeth Bishop* 66). The traveller is caught by the details of the new surroundings, and redirects her thinking towards the possibility of reaching the other's difference without co-opting it into the self. The stanza again opens with nature and landscape, but this time its "exaggerated beauty" is not reduced to the exoticism of "strangers in a play." It acquires an interactive character, gesturing towards a new perception of difference. Such perception is described by the many asides throughout the stanza. From hearing the two-noted tune of the wooden clogs, which, unlike the ones in "another country" (not home anymore), are not tested, to hearing the songbird's music from its cage, a "bamboo church of Jesuit baroque." These apparently insignificant cultural details open to the traveller a door to other engaging reflections. More than only "watching" and "viewing," now the traveller is "pondering," even if "blurr'dly and inconclusively," about the historical connections that "exist for centuries" between these elements. They are different from the "impenetrable stonework" previously "stared at" by the traveller, since they are tangible and function as particles of connection between the traveller's present experience of the country and its historical past. What are the stories hidden behind this "crudest footwear" or the "whittled fantasies of wooden cages?" What legacies do they carry with them? How do their present positions affect the traveller? The answers, as the traveller recognizes, have to be studied "in the weak calligraphy of songbirds' cages," and as "Brazil, January 1, 1502" suggests, they lie in a history of Portuguese colonization, whose traces are still observed and found in the present. Yet, more than re-appropriating such colonial history in re-telling this historical past, the speaker does not further discuss these inconclusive connections, but only hints at her "traveling method." As Fortuny argues, "[h]ow we observe the world and, consequently, what we find there may depend on the conditions of our own fostering; when we learn to look, we find. Respecting the detail at hand, the observing traveler thus gleans information in unorthodox ways" (77). In this sense, for Fortuny, the "empirical experience" presented in the poem counter-argues the suggestion of the second stanza of only "thinking of here" (77-78). Although Fortuny's reading seems to emphasize the importance of "fieldwork" in her reading of

Bishop's poem, I do agree with her suggestion that it is in the close observation of details that Bishop once more re-positions the political aspect of aesthetic observation and representation. Her "drive to the interior" in "Questions of Travel" is related to the moments of connection between self and other – or how to allow the self to recognize and re-read moments of cultural encounter.

After such historical correlations in the reading of detail, this third stanza once more returns to nature, and following it, the traveller raises her final questions:

--And never to have had to listen to rain
so much like politicians' speeches:
two hours of unrelenting oratory
and then a sudden golden silence
in which the traveller takes a notebook, writes:

"Is it lack of imagination that makes us come
to imagined places, not just stay at home?
Or could Pascal have been not entirely right
about just sitting quietly in one's room?

Continent, city, country, society:
the choice is never wide and never free.
And here, or there... No. Should we have stayed at home,
wherever that may be?" (*CP* 94)

In the final verses of the third stanza, one sees, once again, nature interfering in questionings. Yet, on its "golden silence," the traveller is finally able to write down some of her own inconclusive thoughts – the act of writing here representing the recording of the traveller's imagination and perception, symbolically represented by the formality and structure of the two last stanzas. These final verses are, then, a formal recording of what would be left from the traveller's reflections or from her "mind thinking." Once more, "questions of travel" invade the poem: is the need for travelling only a lack of imagination, or can it be approached as more than spectacle? Also, even if considering the imperialistic drives that have governed travel and discovery for centuries, could Pascal be, at least partially, wrong in his assumptions about the shortcomings of one's inability to "[sit] quietly in one's room?"[2] If travel is used as a tool in the assertion of power, can it also be seen as an element for the destabilization of experience, leading to revisionist moments of historical and cultural encounters? Can we really afford not to travel? Even if the inclusive pronoun "we" in the poem is read as only addressing the North American audience to which it is written, one may also read the poem as a call for a re-direction of looking: possibly towards a recognition of the interdependence and complicities between self and other (as Bishop later articulates in "In the Waiting Room," already discussed in chapter 1).

Bishop's writing on travel, as the poem suggests, presents more questioning and inconclusiveness than definitive answers on intercultural experiences. Like the two first poems of her collection, "Questions of Travel" also addresses some of the issues that pervade the interstitial space of encounter. In such space, the traveller has to account for her "immodest demands" or "childish curiosities" over the other, since, as James Clifford suggests, "travel is always a tainted space" (*Routes* 39). Yet, "Questions of Travel" differs from the previous poems and points towards the moments of destabilization of these very demands. As Jeffrey Gray argues, "Bishop helps us understand travel in postmodernity—neither as conquest, nor as pilgrimage, nor even as immersion in societies less spoiled and more grounded than one's own but rather as decentered, travel in which neither the traveling subject nor the visited site are stable entities" (25). In this sense, this poem embodies her reading of travel as destabilization, as an opportunity for further reflections on the relationship between uncertain cultural identities and spaces. Positioned, together with "Arrival at Santos" and "Brazil, January 1, 1502," at the beginning of the Brazil section of her third book of poems, "Questions of Travel" demarcates the kind of travelling territory being explored in her encounters with the Brazilian other.

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[2] According to Fortuny, in *Pensées*, "Pascal [. . .] notes that our restlessness, which is really the result of mankind's general anxiety and is behind our desire to escape, may also lead to political turmoil and war because '[a]ll the misery of man comes from this one thing—the inability to remain at peace in a room'" (79).

After her presentation and discussion of what is involved in the acts of travelling and encountering in the triptych that opens *Questions of Travel*, Bishop finally allows herself to offer the representations of her own travels to the "Brazilian interior." According to Lloyd Schwartz, in the "Brazil" section of her book, "she presents an almost narrative sorting out of her attitudes and experiences there, from her 'Arrival at Santos,' as a tourist, to her complex response to Brazilian social and political problems" ("Annals of Poetry" 91). Thus, the poems that constitute the remaining part of the Brazil section of her book focus on closer observations and descriptions of the people, their surroundings and their culture. These poems range from idyllic admirations of the landscape in Samambaia, such as "Electrical Storm" or "Song for the Rainy Season," to more reflexive poems addressing observation and representation, such as "The Armadillo" and "Twelfth Morning; or What You Will." They also vary from more imagistic poems like "The Riverman," to clear inquiries into social and economic relations, such as "Squatter's Children," "Manuelzinho," and "The Burglar of Babylon." Unlike her letters, in which she experiments with newness and attempts to "rationalize" or at least "explain" (or control) her experience in Brazil, her poetical writing is "inquisitive;" or, as Patricia M. Dwyer argues, "[i]f her prose establishes dividing lines, Bishop's poetry critiques them" (75). In this sense, the poems that follow the opening triptych of the book can indeed be approached as "cultural mediations" of her Brazilian other, but not as unproblematic translations of unfamiliar destinations to familiar ways of seeing. As "Questions of Travel" anticipates, her poetical writing focuses on the limitations and possibilities involved in observing difference from a very marked and ambivalent position.

Some of the borders explored (re-mapped) in Bishop's writing on Brazil redefine the spaces of observation and representation. The complexities of her observations are represented in the juxtaposition of various images of the Brazilian other; the minute and close details (as her poem "Sandpiper" suggests) enable the freshness of these images. More than constructing a "closed" narrative of her Brazilian other, Bishop presents moments of perception, or moments of recognition that tentatively position self and other in a particular poetical encounter. For Victoria Harrison, in poems such as "Squatter's Children" and "Manuelzinho," for example, Bishop focuses on local people such as the Samambaia gardener and his family, "as if through them [Bishop could] further [. . .]

approach an interior" (150). In this context, her poems are attempts to leave behind the "tourist's or traveler's approach" to the Brazilian other. Instead of focusing on her own demands over the new surrounding, Bishop looks at it with attentive eyes. Yet, as Harrison also emphasizes, despite trying to challenge the limitations of her perception of the other's difference, Bishop's voice is inevitably the *observer*'s voice, never the *observed's* (150). Aware of such boundaries, the poet does not try to collapse them, but she experiments with their limits and fluidity, opening a poetical route that allows her to reflect on the "constructedness" of representational practices. This is the route I will follow. More than looking at the chronological order of appearance of Bishop's poems, my reading follows the paths taken in the Brazil section of her book as if they were a cartographical route to the different strategies used to overcome the representational challenges Brazil imposed to her poetical writing.

As Bishop notices in *Brazil*, "Brazil struck all the early explorers as a 'natural paradise,' a 'garden,' and at its best moments it still gives that impression—a garden neglected, abused and still mostly uncultivated, but growing vigorously nevertheless" (11). Seemingly interested in acknowledging or re-discovering this "neglected garden," Bishop not only describes it in her prose or letter-writing (as previously discussed), but she also sets forward to "re-write" it in her poetry. However, her poetry differs from her first attempts to write about Brazil and does not necessarily celebrate or re-create it as a wondrous and enigmatic space. In it, the observer's look is challenged and questioned, particularly due to the fact that the observed space is inhabited and historical. Her poems bring to the fore a different dimension to the approach of Brazil as a pure and uncultivated garden since they focus on how this space has been occupied and re-claimed.

Despite the fact that, in poems such as "Electrical Storm" and "Song for the Rainy Season" Bishop celebrates her space of observation and the lush of the Brazilian scenery around her, these poems are preceded and followed by poetical observations that reflect material social and economic relations in the country. In her poems, nature is not only a given, but becomes a contested space in a historically marked land. If in "Song for the Rainy Season," for instance, the speaker seems caught in the momentary admiration of the natural surroundings, safely removing the house she inhabits from its "ordinary" material existence by enveloping it in a "private cloud" of fog and rain (*CP* 101) from where spectacles such as the brown owl that can count (*CP* 101), or the fat frogs that shrill for love (*CP* 101), or the "white dew / and the milk-white sunrise" (*CP* 101-102) can be privately observed, in a poem such as "Manuelzinho" these natural surroundings are actually marked and re-mapped by "steep paths" (*CP* 96) traced in the continuous "trotting" (*CP* 96) of generations of workers who insist in inhabiting and cultivating it. In this sense, Bishop's poetical choices could be read along the lines of Mary May Lombardi's argument on Bishop's Brazilian translations since this critic sees them as works that would "speak to" the poet."[3] Bishop's poetical writing on Brazil focuses on particular cultural or social elements that teach her lessons on history in their "weak calligraphy" (*CP* 94), challenging, to some extent, the observer's re-appropriation of Brazil as a natural paradise. My reading of these poems follows such focus with an emphasis on her representations of the Brazilian people since through her look at them she is able to further challenge the re-creation of a 'picturesque' Brazil.

The two poems that immediately follow the opening triptych in *Questions of Travel*, "Squatter's Children" and "Manuelzinho," actually correspond to Bishop's first attempts to poetically represent the interrelations between land and people in the Brazilian context she experiences.[4] Bishop bases these poems on her observations of the Samambaia gardener and his family (Harrison 150), and it is interesting to note that the first characteristic discussed about them in the poems is their position in the land, stated either in the poem's title or in its first verses. Such demarcation of space immediately reflects Bishop's own position as the observer of these land relationships: since she is not really a part of them, she tries to overcome in writing the boundaries imposed by her own perception. In "Squatter's Children," for example, the separation between observer and observed is established from the very first verses of the poem, through what Harrison calls "the speaker's distant perspective" (150):

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[3] See Lombardi, *The Body and the Song* 137-138 and 141-142.

> On the unbreathing sides of hills
> they play, a specklike girl and boy,
> alone, but near a specklike house.
> The sun's suspended eye
> blinks casually, and then they wade
> gigantic waves of light and shade.
> A dancing yellow spot, a pup,
> attends them. Clouds are piling up; (*CP* 95)

Although the speaker's distance from the actual scene impedes her to look at the children in full (or recognizable) terms, constructing them as "a specklike girl and boy," there is also some kind of unspoken (or understated) attempt to read these "lines" or "specks" of "light and shade" in the distance, an attempt to recognize what the blurred images are, the "yellow spot" as a pup, for example. By focusing on details, the observing eyes go further than what they can really see, and what they see is a vivid scene: the children are playing, wading in the sun's waves, their pup is "dancing." The second and third stanzas continue the intermingling of perception and description:

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[4] Reference found in Millier 268.

> a storm piled up behind the house.
> The children play at digging holes.
> The ground is hard; they try to use
> one of their father's tools,
> a mattock with a broken haft
> the two of them can scarcely lift.
> It drops and clangs. Their laughter spreads
> effulgence in the thunderheads,
>
> weak flashes of inquiry
> direct as is the puppy's bark.
> But to their little, soluble,
> unwarrantable ark,
> apparently the rain's reply
> consists of echolalia,
> and Mother's voice, ugly as sin,
> keeps calling to them to come in. (*CP* 95)

In these stanzas, the subjective perspective of the observer is slowly being constructed through the speaker's choice of observed detail. The particularities of these children's play, and the juxtaposition of the hardness of the ground and the broken mattock, too heavy for the children, give a sense of concreteness to the scene, which further enhances the meanings of "specklike girl and boy." Yet, the observer's look is not condescending or offering some kind of pitiful image of these children. When they drop the tool, they laugh, as if even defying the announcing of rain. They laugh, "spread[ing] effulgence in the thunderheads," but their voices are not heard. The sounds the speaker hears are the repetitive echoes of rain and the mother's "ugly voice." Away, in the distance, the children's "weak inquiries" are not answered; their "play" is interrupted. The speaker's voice breaks its descriptive pattern and directly addresses the children:

> Children, the threshold of the storm
> has slid beneath your muddy shoes;
> wet and beguiled, you stand among
> the mansions you may choose
> out of a bigger house than yours,
> whose lawfulness endures.
> Its soggy documents retain
> your rights in rooms of falling rain. (*CP* 95)

The speaker's voice is superimposed to the other sounds of the poem, and by rhetorically addressing the children, it directly addresses her readers, in this case both Brazilian and North American readers.[5] If the children's voices are not heard, the speaker in fact *speaks for* them, once more leaving the children "mute," occupying the indeterminate space between full action or only a "supporting role" in the observer's perspective. On the other hand, the indeterminate space these children occupy is further discussed by the speaker's voice, which is not only pure "denouncing" of their "unwarrantable situation," but also an address to the ambivalent position they occupy on the land. They are the ones who inhabit it, but their rights are only to "rooms of falling rain." In the re-definitions of the ambivalent position both observer and observed occupy, the poem articulates a particular look at the other that, more than only being "distanced and preachy," as Harrison argues (154), re-enacts the very act of disenfranchisement these children undergo. Even if, through her observations, the speaker-observer cannot really travel into the interior of her other's differences (she cannot necessarily fully know the squatter's children) since her observations are always outside the particular experience being narrated, it is through a re-imagined connection between the children and the land that she articulates her own look at particular social relations in the country.

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[5] According to Brett Millier, the poem was first published in Portuguese, in March 1956, and then in *The New Yorker*, in March 1957 (268-269).

The poem "Manuelzinho" differs from "Squatter's Children" in its discussion of the relationship between observer and observed, since its main actions are not "distant" from the observer (as the scenes in "Squatter's Children"), but taking place in Samambaia itself, demanding a certain degree of involvement. In this poem, Bishop opts for a subjective perspective, but she writes it "in Lota's voice," which means the poem should be approached as Lota's monologue addressing the gardener. The poem presents a note (or a subtitle) that reads: "Brazil. A friend of the writer is speaking" (*CP* 96). In letters from the time of the poem's publication, Bishop recognizes this friend as being Lota.[6] For Brett Millier, the strategy of using Lota's voice to address her observations "suspend the question of whether she herself 'knew enough' or had a right to talk about the complex Brazilian social hierarchy" (271). At the same time, according to Victoria Harrison,

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[6] In a letter to May Swenson from 1956, Bishop writes: "*The New Yorker* took a long, long poem ["Manuelzinho"]—to my great surprise [. . .] It's supposed to be Lota talking, and I do hope you will like it" (*OA* 315).

"Manuelzinho" differs from "Squatter's Children," which for the critic presents a detached point of view, and presents a conversation "among the speaker, the 'writer'/auditor, and the reader, over and against the enacted relationship with Manuelzinho" (152). Yet, instead of approaching the poem's strategy as only an "authorization" for her writing, or as a "triangular conversation," one can also read it as a further questioning of the limits of observation. By presenting the figure of the gardener through Lota's point of view, the poem also discusses the question of perception and the distances that separate both observer and observed, particularly considering the social relations being represented in the poem. Despite the "familiar" or "anecdotal" tone of the poem, its images gradually distance the gardener from the reader, paralleling as well the sense of separation between master and server in the kind of economic relation Lota, as a landowner, has with her gardener. Through the speaker's judgmental and condescending descriptions of Manuelzinho's life and actions, he becomes more a character of a story than an actual person, a characteristic Bishop uses throughout the poem to establish the grounds of the ambivalent social and economic relations she observes in Samambaia.

Constructed as a monologue in which the speaker attempts to re-define not only Manuelzinho's positions but also her own, the poem "places" him both in the land and in the kind of interaction he has with his employer from its very first verses:

> Half squatter, half tenant (no rent)—
> a sort of inheritance; white,
> in your thirties now, and supposed
> to supply me with vegetables,
> but you don't; or you won't; or you can't

get the idea through your brain—
the worst gardener since Cain. (*CP* 96)

These opening verses already signal some of the contradictions that constitute this relationship, and which will be further explored throughout the poem. The speaker's tone is impatient; Manuelzinho's position is not easily defined (he is a worker, but at the same time, "a sort of inheritance"); and despite being called "the worst gardener since Cain," his gardens "ravish" the speaker's eyes with its "beds of silver cabbages [edged] with red carnations" (*CP* 96) or with its "lettuces mix[ed] with alyssum" (*CP* 96), and eventually he produces "a mystic three-legged carrot, / or a pumpkin bigger than the baby" (*CP* 96). There is a sense of both impatience and amazement in the speaker's voice, and the hierarchy of their relationship is further explored in the second stanza:

I watch you through the rain,
trotting, light, on bare feet,
up the steep paths you have made—
or your father and grandfather made—
all over my property,
with your head and back inside
a sodden burlap bag,
and feel I can't endure it
another minute; then,
indoors, beside the stove,
keep on reading a book. (*CP* 96)

The ambiguity of the speaker's voice becomes apparent here. The attempted reading of the social and historical context that further alienates Manuelzinho from the speaker is recognized, but immediately undermined by her ironic indignation regarding the gardener's use of a "sodden burlap bag" for protection. At the same time, the speaker reveals her own position in relation to the gardener. Her indignation towards Manuelzinho's actions lasts only until she stops observing him to go back to reading a book. Warm, protected inside *her* property, with her intellectual "distractions," the speaker, as the landowner, is also defined against the position Manuelzinho and his family occupy in a continued economic system that has been taking place for generations. As the "master" in this relationship, the speaker does not necessarily "challenge" such system, but actually seems to endorse it by her discussion of Manuelzinho as this "foolish man" (*CP* 99), further constructed as both reckless and simple-minded:

> You steal my telephone wires,
> or someone does. You starve
> your horse and yourself
> and your dog and family.
> [. . . . .]
> And once I yelled at you
> so loud to hurry up
> and fetch me those potatoes
> your holey hat flew off,
> you jumped out of your clogs,
> leaving three objects arranged

> in a triangle at my feet,
> as if you'd been a gardener
> in a fairy tale all this time
> and at the word "potatoes"
> had vanished to take up your work
> of fairy prince somewhere. (*CP* 96-97)

The "fairy-tale" tone of the poem is continuously increased, transforming "Manuelzinho" more and more in this almost "other-worldly character," to whom the "strangest things happen" (*CP* 97); from his cow who eats a "'poison grass' / and drops dead on the spot" (*CP* 97) to his disbelief in his father's death despite the fact "[t]hey're burying him today" (*CP* 97). The "dreamy" tone of their interactions involves even the supposed practicality of their economic relations:

> [. . .] you come to settle
> what we call our "accounts,"
> with two old copybooks,
> one with flowers on the cover,
> the other with a camel.
> Immediate confusion.
> You've left out the decimal points.
> Your columns stagger,
> honeycombed with zeros.
> You whisper conspiratorially;
> the numbers mount to millions.

Account books? They are Dream Books.
In the kitchen we dream together
how the meek shall inherit the earth—
or several acres of mine. (*CP* 98)

The speaker once more discredits Manuelzinho's actions. His books generate confusion, since the decimal points are left out. They become "Dream Books," and again the actuality of the gardener's situation is dismissed by the speaker's condescending tone of resolving their "accounts" by "dreaming together." One also sees a similar dismissal in the final scene of the poem, in which, after the speaker's descriptions of the gardener's patched clothes, instead of focusing on the economic particularities of his situation, she focuses on the aesthetics of his hat:

You paint—heaven knows why—
the outside of the crown
and brim of your straw hat.
Perhaps to reflect the sun?
Or perhaps when you were small,
your mother said, "Manuelzinho,
one thing: be sure you always
paint your straw hat."
One was gold for a while,
but the gold wore off, like plate.
One was bright green. Unkindly,
I called you Klorophyll Kid.

My visitors thought it was funny.
I apologize here and now.

You helpless, foolish man,
I love you all I can,
I think. Or do I?
I take off my hat, unpainted
and figurative, to you.
Again I promise to try. (*CP* 99)

In the closing lines of the poem, the speaker recognizes her unsympathetic look at Manuelzinho, but seems also to excuse it through an alleged love she is not even sure about. By taking off her "unpainted and figurative" hat to him, she positions herself once more in a patronizing location of power and command.

For critics such as Victoria Harrison, by presenting a speaker who does not challenge the economic hierarchy of landownership in Brazil, and who is decided to only love the gardener and laugh with the reader, "Bishop, the 'writer,' refuses to condemn that position, even as she leaves us the opening, through her poem's contrived conversation, to challenge the nature of this representation" (154). In a similar line of thought, Brett Millier suggests that the "poem does not question deeply the paternalistic system; rather, it examines anecdotally the thinking of one of its participants" (272). Indeed, as Millier points out, despite her criticism, Bishop's situation in Brazil was extremely interlocked to the kind of economic system taking place in Samambaia, and her observations of her surroundings would inevitably reflect her immediate relations with it. However, instead of looking at her choice of using Lota's voice as a way to avoid or soften "social commentary" or direct confrontation with a reality she may not feel completely free to talk about, one can also read it as a strategy to explore, through the limits of her own perception, the contradictory roles the two subjects (Lota and the gardener) play in their social relations.

Bishop uses Lota's voice to address Manuelzinho, but it is what the poet (as an observer) perceives in their relations that matters – the ambivalent tone of the speaker, who both "complains about" and "judges" Manuelzinho, and is at the same time "ravished" and "entertained" by him, carries with it a re-discussion of power. In the space between condescension and condemnation, both the speaker and Manuelzinho "take advantage of" or "*aproveitam-se*" of their ambivalent positions – Manuelzinho by eventually getting what he and his family need from the landowner (a place to live, money, food and medicine), and the speaker by perpetuating an economic system that guarantees her own privileges. In their relations, power is challenged and contested by Manuelzinho's many unexpected actions; at the same time, it is immediately recovered by the speaker, who constantly drives him "back to his place" as the "helpless, foolish man" (*CP* 99) who, as she misrecognizes him, is incapable of "trying again." Although Harrison does raise a significant point when arguing that "the Brazilian man is indeed known only through the lively perceptions of Bishop and Macedo Soares" (155), it is by presenting a filtered perception of Manuelzinho that the poem becomes a site for further questioning of power in the discourse of representation. The speaker's frequent "devaluing" of the gardener's actions carry with it a certain anxiety of "excuse" (probably the same kind of anxiety Bishop herself felt when admitting to her friends Ilse and Kit

Barker she was feeling guilty for earning money from writing about him).[7] Bishop also anxiously recognizes that, despite the attempts to cross the boundaries that separate Manuelzinho's world from both the speaker's and the writer's world of observation, the reaching towards the other's difference is, as Lota's action of taking off her hat to the gardener, only "figurative." Yet, in its recuperation of the prevailing colonial relations between master and server in Lota's estate, the poem reveals the hidden elements of power struggle and contestation embedded in Bishop's re-reading of the Brazilian land.

Bishop's experimentations with the representation of Brazilian people and culture are not only restricted to "Squatter's Children" and "Manuelzinho." In the poem "The Riverman," Bishop re-writes the story of an Amazonian man who wants to become a *sacaca*, or, as she explains in a note to the poem, "a witch doctor who works with water spirits" (*CP* 105). This time, her poem is not based on "first-hand" observations, but on the reading of *Amazon Town*, an ethnographical study, originally published by Charles Wagley in 1953 (see note on page 119), to which Bishop refers in her note to the poem, and from which she quotes (and even borrows) many of the riverman's actions and dreams. In his book, Wagley presents an account of his years of fieldwork and research in a small village in the Amazon, which includes comments on religion and beliefs, such as the story of *sacacas*. Following a similar pattern to that in "Manuelzinho," "The Riverman" is also mediated by Wagley's ethnographical study. Yet, in this poem, Bishop adopts the voice of a male persona, reconstructing the story of Satiro, which is told in Wagley's book (Wagley 230-233). In the recovery of this man's story, Bishop once more explores the limits between known and unknown territories, and with him attempts to plunge into the interiority of a 'new world.'

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[7] In a letter to her friends Kit and Ilse Barker from June 1956, after the publication of "Manuelzinho," Bishop writes: "I've earned so much money off the poor little man now I feel guilty every time he comes to the kitchen door with a bunch of monster radishes" (qtd. in Harrison 152).

Like the gardener Manuelzinho, the riverman is also represented as possessing some extraordinary qualities, which inevitably locate him in an ambivalent position: at the border-crossing between two worlds, his own, and the world of the river with its water spirits. However, unlike Manuelzinho's story, the riverman's narrative is not mocked or laughed at. His actions are narrated in the first person, and his discoveries of the "under-river world" are approached with seriousness and willingness, even if they can also be compared to the dream-like fantasy of Manuelzinho's world. The riverman's story starts when he hears, at night, the grunt of the Dolphin (one of the animals with magical powers in Amazonian culture):[8]

> He grunted beneath my window,
> hid by the river mist,
> but I glimpsed him—a man like myself.
> I threw off my blanket, sweating;
> I even tore of my shirt.
> I got out of my hammock
> and went through the window naked.
> My wife slept and snored. (*CP* 105)

In this abandonment of everything that connects him with his regular life, the riverman waits for the re-birth the river will proportionate him:

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[8] In Amazonian culture, as Bishop writes in her note to the poem, "the river dolphin [*boto*] is believed to have supernatural powers" (*CP* 105), usually related to its ability to transform itself into the figure of a man, mainly to seduce women.

> I stood there listening
> till he called from far outstream.
> I waded into the river
> and suddenly a door
> in the water opened inward,
> groaning a little, with water
> bulging above the lintel.
> I looked back at my house,
> white as a piece of washing
> forgotten on the bank,
> and I thought once of my wife,
> but I knew what I was doing. (*CP* 105-106).

There is no doubt in the riverman's mind about his decision to exchange the commonality of his house, as a "white piece of washing on the riverbank," to the mysterious door of the river. His wife's memory is also not enough to stop him from becoming the most powerful of the witch doctors, the *sacaca*, the one who has the power to travel miles under water and learn the river knowledge. Because of the poem's appeal to the complete abandonment in a different world, critics have approached it as Bishop's metaphorical immersion in the Brazilian culture and her new surroundings. For Lloyd Schwartz, for example, this is a poem where "Bishop makes her most remarkable identification with her new country" ("Annals of Poetry" 91). According to the critic, in previous poems such as "At the Fishhouse," Bishop had already manifested her belief in "total immersion," and "'The Riverman' embodies that 'belief' literally" ("Annals of Poetry 91).

Victoria Harrison makes a similar point in arguing that, "the riverman and his writer are similarly curious to know a life they glimpse from the outside" (155). In this sense, the poem is approached as Bishop's manifested desire to assimilate (or be assimilated) by the differences of her Brazilian other. What seems interesting to me, though, is that such a plunge to the river bottom brings with it a recreation of a connection with the natural world in a way that does not necessarily try to control it, but is actually completely controlled or transformed by it. The river-world, as some critics such as Thomas Travisano and Neil Besner have already noted, is a world of possibilities, of interactions in historical time, where present and past traditions intertwine.[9] In deciding to take "such plunge" in the voices and characters of the riverman, Bishop attempts to destabilize the re-inscription of the 'interiority' of this unknown world in recognizable terms, creating a communion that goes beyond mere observation.

The process of becoming a *sacaca* also requires more than detached observation of the river world. It demands participation and involvement; when arriving in the under-river world, the riverman takes part in the process of initiation, drinking *cachaça* (sugar-cane liquor) from a shell, and smoking "decorated cigars" (*CP* 106). Also, when "[t]he room [is] filled with gray-green smoke and [his] head couldn't been dizzier" (CP 106), it is time to meet Luandinha, one of the most powerful spirits of the river:[10]

She complimented me
in a language I didn't know;
but when she blew cigar smoke

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[9] See Travisano 159-160, and Neil Besner, "Brazil in Bishop's Eyes," *"In Worcester, Massachusetts:" Essays on Elizabeth Bishop*, eds. Laura Jehn Menides and Angela G. Dorenkamp (New York: Peter Lang, 1999) 78-80.

[10] As Bishop writes in her note to the poem, "Luandinha is a river spirit associated with the moon" (*CP* 105). According to Charles Wagley, Luandinha is usually imagined as a "large water snake" (228).

into my ears and nostrils
I understood, like a dog,
although I can't speak it yet.
They showed me room after room
and took me from here to Belém
and back again in a minute.
In fact, I'm not sure where I went,
but miles, under the river. (*CP* 106)

Despite not fully comprehending the mysteries of the river spirits, the riverman does not give up. His immersion into the river world starts transforming him:

Three times now I've been there.
I don't eat fish any more.
There is fine mud on my scalp
and I know from smelling my comb
that the river smells in my hair.
My hands and feet are cold.
I look yellow, my wife says,
and she brews me stinking teas
I throw out, behind her back. (*CP* 106)

The riverman is being transformed; yet, this is not enough. Although he "know[s] some things already, / [. . .] it will take years of study, / it is all so difficult" (*CP* 107). Moreover, he also needs a new set of tools that will help him comprehend the water spirits' world:

> I need a virgin mirror
> no one's ever looked at,
> that's never looked back at anyone,
> to flash up the spirit's eyes
> and help me recognize them. (*CP* 107)

Paradoxically, this is something almost impossible to get. As the riverman tells,

> The storekeeper offered me
> a box of little mirrors,
> but each time I picked one up
> a neighbor looked over my shoulder
> and then that one was spoiled—
> spoiled, that is, for anything
> but the girls to look at their mouths in,
> to examine their teeth and smiles. (*CP* 107)

The means (or tools) for recognition (the mirrors) are still only good for mundane reasons (the girls' examination of their smiles). The "purity" of their reflections is not something easy to find. For Harrison, through this particular passage, "Bishop exposes [. . .] the mystical dream of pure, direct intercourse with another. The riverman does not, of course, find such a mirror; he crosses the last barrier between his safe world and the magical dangers of the *sacaca* only in dream" (156). Although, for Harrison, the poem continuously suggests the limitations of the "outsider" perspective, there is another possibility in reading the poem as well. Even after realizing the intangibility of the mirror task, the riverman continues to reaffirm his dream: "Why shouldn't I be ambitious? / I sincerely desire to be / a serious *sacaca*" (*CP* 107). The river secrets are hidden, "in that magic mud, beneath / the multitudes of fish" (*CP* 108); but even if a "complete comprehension" is still not possible, maybe it is in the realization that there are only moments of recognition or bridging between the two worlds that the riverman's answer lies:

> When the moon burns white
> and the river makes that sound
> like a primus pumped up high—
> that fast, high whispering
> like a hundred people at once—
> I'll be there below,
> [. . . . .]
> travelling fast as a wish,
> with my magic cloak of fish
> swerving as I swerve,
> following the veins,
> the river's long, long veins,
> to find the pure elixirs.
> [. . . . .]
> When the moon shines and the river
> lies across the earth
> and sucks it like a child,
> then I will go to work

to get you health and money.
The Dolphin singled me out;
Luandinha seconded it. (*CP* 108-109)

The poem does not necessarily present a complete mastering of the river world, but moments of recognition in the encounter, or possible manifestations, of one world into the other. One of the paradoxes of the poem is that, despite the presentation of the riverman's "dreams" of complete immersion and understanding, the poem itself is still based on mediated knowledge – on Bishop's reading of Wagley's discussions of the *sacaca* powers, a fact that actually unsettled the poet and led her to dismiss it as not "authentic."[11] At the same time, and because of this "inauthenticity," the poem becomes even more significant – a dream of unmediated knowledge which actually reproduces its own realizations of the impossibility of this "complete un-mediation."

Further, by presenting a character who defies pre-established or expected roles and who takes a plunge into the natural world as if re-claiming it, Bishop disrupts a re-consumption of the local and natural surroundings of the Amazonian culture by the foreigner traveller-observer. Her look at or her recreation of the riverman's story differs from Charles Wagley's and his ethnographical discourse, since it presents an un-fixed and impermanent world. In Wagley's study, the riverman is only one of the subjects who may lead him to a better understanding of "ethnic" cultures. In Bishop's portrait, the riverman's position is never stable. He keeps "throwing away" the "stinking teas" that will re-connect him with a fixed and permanent identity, and he even advises us:

I hear your voices talking.

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[11] As Harrison notes, "Bishop cautioned several friends that she had written it before her trip on the Amazon and that she was drafting a much better Amazon poem. Its inauthenticity bothered her" (157).

> You can peer down and down
> or dredge the river bottom
> but never, never catch me. (*CP* 109)

As the native women in "Brazil January 1, 1502" who, like the birds, keep calling each other and retreating to a hiding interior, the riverman also seems to embody what can never be fully known or demarcated by ethnographical eyes. Even if one reads, along Harrison or Schwartz, the image of the riverman as Bishop's own attempts to immerse herself in the interiority of her Brazilian experience, one also sees that, more than reflecting the 'actuality' of the other, this image reflects the poet's encounter with her own desire for reaching to the other, demarcating always the ambiguity of her position there.

In the last poem of the Brazil section, "The Burglar of Babylon," Bishop once more directs her close look to another Brazilian inhabitant. This time, her focus is on Micuçú, a burglar who has escaped prison and is hiding from the police in the hills of Babylon, one of the slums located in the mountains of the city of Rio de Janeiro. The poem is based on an actual manhunt Bishop witnesses from her apartment in Rio. In the preface to the version of the poem in her book of 1968, she says:[12]

> The story of Micuçú is true. It happened in Rio de Janeiro a few years ago. I have changed only one or two minor details, and, of course, translated the names of the slums. [. . .]
>
> I was one of those who watched the pursuit through binoculars, although really we could see very little of it: just a few of the soldiers silhouetted against the

---

[12] This poem was also published in the format of a book for children as *The Ballad of the Burglar of Babylon* in 1968.

> skyline of the hill of Babylon. The rest of the story is taken, often word for word, from the daily papers, filled out by what I know of the place and the people. (*The Ballad* unpaginated)

As Victoria Harrison argues, Bishop's words immediately position her as the observer of this story, outside its main actions, but at the same time she is committed to look for information to "fill in the gaps" of the social and cultural context of its scenario (162). Thus, Micuçú's story is told as a ballad, through which the popular imaginary surrounding this particular character and his relation with the Rio slums is juxtaposed to the poet's own limited observations. Moreover, despite the fact the poet argues she could not see much of the actions taking place in the hills, her position as "one of those who watched [. . .] through binoculars" is very significant in the context of what kind of "scenic spectacle" Micuçú's hunt provides its audience.

In one of her letters to May Swenson, from 1959, Bishop thanks her friend for the gift sent: a pair of binoculars. As she acknowledges to her friend, "[i]t is the nicest and most overwhelming present I've received for years [. . .]. I found I could read the titles on the pocket books at the other end of the airport, and after exhausting that pleasure I went outside and looked at Rio off in the distance. They seem *fearfully* powerful to me" (*OA* 377). As if in direct contrast to the images the binoculars are able to provide its users, Micuçú's story actually disrupts any scenic contemplation of Rio's life. His actions are observed from a distance, but his position is grounded in the complex social context he lives in. This context is explored and narrated since the first refrain stanzas that open the ballad of his life:

> On the fair green hills of Rio

There grows a fearful stain:
The poor who come to Rio
And can't go home again.

On the hills a million people,
A million sparrows, nest,
Like a confused migration
That's had to light and rest,

Building its nests, or houses,
Out of nothing at all, or air.
You'd think a breath would end them,
They perch so lightly there.

But they cling and spread like lichen,
And the people come and come.
There's one hill called the Chicken,
And one called the Catacomb;

There's the hill of Kerosene,
And the hill of the Skeleton,
The hill of Astonishment,
And the hill of Babylon. (*CP* 112)

The ballad's opening verses, more than contextualizing Micuçú's life through a description of the hill of Babylon where the burglar was raised, also tell a story about the formation of Rio slums. The speaker-observer reads them as the result of a "confused migration" initiated by economic reasons, further explained in the book version of the poem in Bishop's own words: "the poor people who live in the slums of Rio have usually come from the north or northeast of Brazil" (*The Ballad* unpaginated), where one finds some of the most arid regions of the country. Attracted by the prosperity of southern regions, "the people come and come," forming what is perceived in the poem as a "fearful stain" that actually obstructs the observer-speaker's view of the "fair green hills of Rio." Unable to deny such reality, the speaker sings one of its inhabitants' life, even if still undecided about how to read this particular social phenomenon – the speaker's views on the people inhabiting these hills range from the fragility of birds, to the enduring and threatening nature of spreading lichen.

A similar ambiguity or uncertainty, a paradoxical mixture of fear and empathy, can also be perceived in the poem's construction of Micuçú, although his first introduction is definitive and straightforward:

> Micuçú was a burglar and killer,
>   An enemy of society.
> He had escaped three times
>   From the worst penitentiary.
>
> They don't know how many he murdered
>   (Though they say he never raped),

And he wounded two policemen,
This last time he escaped.

They said, "He'll go to his auntie,
Who raised him like a son.
She has a little shop
On the hill of Babylon. (*CP* 112-113)

Described as an enemy of society, Micuçú, like both Manuelzinho and the riverman, also occupies a transitory position in the border-crossing between belonging or not in a particular social order. By choosing to escape and hide in the hills of Babylon, the burglar defies a pre-exiting or expected course of actions for his own story. His choice is deliberate and as he tells his auntie:

Ninety years they gave me.
Who wants to live that long?
I'll set for ninety hours,
On the hills of Babylon. (*CP* 113).

This choice will seal his fate, but he also "takes the plunge," and decides to experience, even if for the last time, what life in the hills brings to him: the view of the ocean, the freighters, "the goats *baa-baa*-ing," the babies crying, and the "kites strained upward" (*CP* 113-114). Micuçú's position is embedded in the social nuclei he is a part of: the poverty of the hills of Babylon, and his aunt's family ties. Yet, despite the tempting approach of looking at his life as only a result of being raised in this particular social context, the poem actually reveals how the whole society becomes implicated in the construction of Micuçú as this dangerous and wanted outlaw. By presenting a re-invention of the burglar's perspective over the *carioca* scenery around him, Bishop re-inserts other members of this social order as complicit observers of Micuçú's fate. As Victoria Harrison points out, "[j]ust as the poem seems to set us in a safe position of removed observation, however, it challenges that very position" (163). Harrison reads this challenge as Bishop's attempt to "[draw] a parallel between Micuçú and his newly made audience" (163) in their acts of observation and description. Even if I do not necessarily read such challenge as a paralleling of perspectives in the poem, since Micuçú's re-invented observations do not erase his differences from the observers of his manhunt in the sense that his perspective is only guessed and never really shared (known), I do agree that it is by dislocating the point of view from the observer, to the observed, that Bishop actually reinserts a powerful recognition on the "constructedness" of representation. In the poem, Micuçú's position defies "order" since his eyes are the only ones who actually see:

> An Army helicopter
>   Came nosing around and in.
> He could see two men inside it,
>   But they never spotted him.
>
> Children peeked out of windows,
>   And men in the drink shop swore,
> And spat a little *cachaça*
>   At the light cracks in the floor. (*CP* 114)

In the rushed attempts to regain control over a disturbed order, even the police misrecognize their "wanted man," and as the ballad tells us, "one of them, in a panic, / [s]hot the officer in command" (*CP* 114). This officer, ironically sharing the sparrow's migratory quality since described as a "man from Pernambuco, / The youngest of eleven" (*CP* 115), is also killed by a desire to see and control Micuçú's fate.[13]

Moreover, hidden in the hills of Babylon, Micuçú does not observe only the soldiers but other sectors of society as well:

He saw the long white beaches
  And people going to swim,
With towels and beach umbrellas,
  But the soldiers were after him.

Far, far below, the people
  Were little colored spots,
And the heads of those in swimming
  Were floating coconuts.

He heard the peanut vendor
  Go *peep-peep* on his whistle,
And the man that sells umbrellas
  Swinging his watchman's rattle.

Women with market baskets

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[13] Pernambuco is also located in the northeast of Brazil.

Stood on the corners and talked,
Then went on their way to market,
Gazing up as they walked.

The rich with their binoculars
Were back again, and many
Were standing on the rooftops,
Among TV antennae. (*CP* 115-116)

Yet, Micuçú's "invisibility," as he always knew, does not last forever. He is finally found and shot, and with his death,

The police and the populace,
Heaved a sigh of relief,
But behind the counter his auntie
Wiped her eyes in grief. (*CP* 117)

At the end of the poem, Micuçú's defiance survives only in the mouths and stories of those who remember him, like his aunt or her customers, who try to define what kind of an "enemy" he really was, at least until a next round of "outlaws" come to hide in the Babylon hills again. The ballad's end is cyclical; the focus goes back to the character of the "fearful stain" formed by the poor who inhabit the "fair green hills of Rio." Micuçú becomes one more name in life narratives only observed from binoculars.

Micuçú's story, presented at the very end of the Brazil section of *Questions of Travel*, has been constantly read as a highlight of Bishop's position regarding her experience and reading of the Brazilian culture. According to Thomas Travisano, for example, in this poem, "Bishop's Brazil was no longer just a theatre for the tourist. She was now implicated in its unfolding human patterns" (167). Even the poet herself, in the preface previously quoted, acknowledges the fact that her representations of Micuçú's story are mediated not only by her own perception of what is observed and read on the news but also "by what [she] know[s] of the place and the people" (*The Burglar* unpaginated). Thus, by extension, the poem also becomes a mediated representation of Bishop's version of the place itself. Through this process, Bishop explores the limits of her own perception, crossing the boundaries between the known (since observed) and the unknown (the other's difference), re-imagining and re-discovering it in her poetry. Yet, she does not necessarily fix her observations of Brazil in the stillness of an archaeological study. By focusing on people such as Micuçú, the riverman, and Manuelzinho and his children, Bishop actually chooses to focus on ambivalence and transience, on people who inhabit the land, and are constantly transforming and being transformed by it. The re-mapping of their lives allows Bishop to reflect on the complexities embedded in representation, challenging the re-inscription of Brazil as a picturesque range of "fair green mountains."

For David Kalstone, the Brazil section in *Questions of Travel* "is remarkable in Bishop's work for the process it represents, the acts of self-location. It begins in the margin and ends in a rounded participation in the world" (218). If indeed Bishop's poems trace a representational process in terms of self-location, it is not only from a question of being a "full participant" in the Brazilian scenario, but of presenting different strategies in the processes of observing and representing her cultural encounters. The initial triptych frames her reading of travel, inserting it in a historical but also personal context of re-discovery; at the same time she chooses not to re-tell a Brazilian history of colonization and appropriation, but to observe its legacies, its present details, its nuances. If Brazil is re-read as a 'wondrous' world (as other exploratory narratives had defined it in the past), the stories of burglars, squatters and shamans invade the reading imaginary and disturb the scenery by reminding the reader, and even the writer, these spaces have also been occupied and historically contested. However, one can definitely say that these same stories carry with them another level of imposition on the other, related to its reading in terms of its "exotic" features, being the outcasts of society. It seems, then, that one of Bishop's strategies is to focus on how these stories can only be re-discovered through representation, as constructs, or as results of the tensions between observer and observed. Unlike some of her unpublished poems, in which Bishop tried to use a more political or "denouncing" tone, such as "Brasil, 1959" and "A Baby Found in the Garbage," the Brazil poems in *Questions of Travel* are framed by perspective, by the interaction of looks and subjectivity, which inevitably shapes the encounter with difference.[14] In this sense, Bishop's Brazil poems stand on the ambivalence of representation, and as the fire balloons in her poem "The Armadillo," they are double-folded: they both illuminate and further alienate her other.

Bishop and Brazil: "flowing and flown" Re-mappings of History

Even after the publication of *Questions of Travel*, Bishop continues to produce poetical constructions of Brazil. In them, the tensions between the scenery around her and the people who inhabit and mark these landscapes also accompany her writing. In poems such as "Going to the Bakery," "Under the Window: Ouro Prêto," or even "Pink Dog" (one of Bishop's last completed poems), one notes the speaker-observer's negotiations with the elements surrounding her, in an attempt to, at the same time, cover and reveal what is observed. Yet, I would like to conclude this chapter with one of Bishop's prose pieces on Brazil, in which she also presents some of the tensions involved in observation and representation, particularly in a cross-cultural context.

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[14] The first stanza of "Brazil, 1959," for example, reads: "The radio says black beans are up again. / That means five hundred percent / in the past year, but no one quite believes it. / They're lying there, wherever they are raised, / those that do get to Rio are full of worms. / Somehow most come to term somehow / and get a bellyful once a day" (*EAP* 122). In poems such as this, it seems Bishop attempted a "more general" focus on Brazil, not necessarily approaching the specificity of details and the intricacies of the relation between observer and observed.

In her story "To the Botequim and Back," Bishop recounts one of her every-day "expedition[s]" (*CPr* 73) in the city of Ouro Preto, where she also lived.[15] This particular "journey" is to the *botequim*, or "a little shop or 'grocery store,' where [she] buys a liter of milk every morning" (*CPr* 74). Through this seemingly "matter-of-fact" account, the observer's attempt at framing the observed space in the scenic admiration of a "postal card" is once more challenged. In the "twenty minutes or so the expedition takes" (*CPr* 73), the narrator is committed to describe what she sees:

> It is a beautiful bright morning, big soft clouds moving rather rapidly high up, making large patches of opaque blue on the green hills and rocky peaks. [. . .] Two kinds of morning glory adorn the standing walls of a ruined house—a pale lavender kind and a bright purple, pink-centered kind, hundreds of gaudy flowers stretching open to the sun as wide as they possibly can. All along the way the stone walls are flourishing after the January rains with mosses, maidenhair ferns, and a tiny yellow flower. (*CPr* 73)

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[15] I am using the current Portuguese spelling for the word "preto," which is different from the spelling Bishop uses, "prêto," when she writes.

In her trajectory, nature and its plants and flowers, mixed with the ruins and architecture of the old colonial town, become the focus of the observer's attention. Yet, even in her attempts to direct her eyes to the landscape, the narrator also notices that there is "[c]onstant coming and going on the sidewalk" (*CPr* 75). Little by little the scenery starts to become inhabited: from the men who play with a snooker table in a small room almost blocking the sidewalk, to the boys who take their little brother to the barber's shop and hold him in the barber's chair in a "tight embrace" (*CPr* 73) or to the lady who "holds an apricot-coloured umbrella [. . .] high over her head to give as much shade as possible to herself, the baby in her arms, and two little ones trailing behind" (*CPr* 75). These are all characters dwelling in and reclaiming the space of the baroque town from the observer's eager descriptions of scenery. More than a framing of the surroundings in the imaginative ordering of a fresh-paint, the observer recognizes movement and transformation. At the end of the story such recognitions become even more poignant when, after admiring a distant plateau where "a few ruins [. . .] have turned back into houses again" (*CPr* 78), the narrator-observer realizes: "But someone lives there!" (*CPr* 78). It seems that it is exactly in the re-discovery of the space as inhabited and historical that Bishop destabilizes the "fixity" or "stillness" of representation and by focusing on the people who "come and go" and continuously transform the observed scenery, the poet challenges the very act of representing the new surroundings.

At the end of the story, Bishop also describes the river that runs along the colonial town and "keeps descending, disappears into a cavern, and is never seen again" and "talks as it goes, but the words are lost" (*CPr* 79). Like this "river's talk," the words or voices of those Bishop observes are not necessarily heard in her poetical representations.

The space they occupy is always marked by difference, and as an outsider, she is not able to completely reach towards it. Yet, by focusing on the observed details of such places and on how they have been continuously transformed by those who occupy them, Bishop disrupts a re-reading of them as "new" or "re-discovered," since they are embedded in their historical legacies. In attempting to read these legacies in the "weak calligraphy" of everyday expeditions in the land, Bishop recreates a space for her own observing eyes in her experiences of the South American country.

In Bishop's writing on Brazil, there is a constant negotiation between her position as an observer or outsider and her perceptions of the observed space. The poet seems to recognize that there is no fine balance between the idealized representation of the other (with its idyllic natural beauty) and the denouncing and socially-charged representations of Brazilian cultural aspects. She opts for resisting both extremes, even risking being read as not strongly committed to a particular view of the country. At the same time, her focus on perception, and on how, even in attempts at self-forgetfulness, the self also gets re-written in its encounters with the outside world, Bishop presents a re-reading of the connections between self and other (or in the particular case of her Brazil poems, between North and South). By reflecting on such questions almost twenty years before current discussions on the politics of location, she opens new paths of exploration between travel and representation. A re-reading of her poetical works offers an opportunity to engage in such questions by considering her early contribution to this debate. This negotiation with Brazil as a lived and poetic space provides some ways to talk about other poets, such as P.K. Page and Jan Conn, who would have to come to terms with similar experiences. It is to these writers that we turn in the following chapters.

Part 2

Re-mappings of the Self

Chapter 4 – "All is prepared for the incredible journey:" P. K. Page's Travelling Webs and her Brazilian Golden Dream

Two kinds of web: the one
not there. A sheet of glass.
Look! I am flying through air,
spinning in emptiness ... SPUNG!
... bounced on a flexible wire,
caught by invisible guys.

The other a filigree, gold
as the call of a trumpet. A sun
to my myriad-faceted eye.
A season. A climate. Compelled
and singing hosannas I fly:
I dazzle. I struggle. I drown.
"Fly: on Webs," P.K. Page

Full of nuances and beauty, P. K. Page's writing, as the golden web mentioned in the epigraph above, engages and seduces us. Despite the fascination, it is also very difficult to start writing on Page without feeling (even if a little) overwhelmed by the vastness of her work. Since the publication of her first poem, "The Moth," in 1934,[1] when she was still making her first attempts in poetry writing, until today, Page has secured to herself an important position in Canadian literary circles. Her writing has been not only celebrated through the granting of different awards and honourable distinctions, but it has also been praised by many critics and fellow writers. George Woodcock, for example, describes her as "one of Canada's best living poets, a writer of English verse with few rivals anywhere in the Anglophone world" ("Smith's People" 103), and Margaret Atwood also praises Page's poetical ability to transform and transmute "daily lead and never free of conflict. In the traveller's search for difference, her own subjectivity is re-discovered, and in her reading of these new travelling routes, Conn re-maps the "long cord" of creation that, in the Brazil poems, connects North and South.

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[1] Reference found in Orange 2. P.K. Page also discusses the publication of this first poem in her interview with Sandra Djwa, published in December 1996 (see Djwa, "Interview" 37).

It is in this context that Conn inserts some of her later poems on Brazil. In them, the poet recreates the connections between the space being travelled and the space left behind. As in her early poem "In a Black Wind," Conn is interested in focusing on how, in the crossing of borders between different locations, one becomes immediately implicated in the outcomes of cultural exchange. In most of her poetical writing on travel published in her fourth collection, *What Dante Did with Loss* (1994), spaces, destinations, landscapes, customs and other cultural elements are all put in relation to each other, and there is no naïve encounter – neither in the actually travelled space nor in the imagistic representations of the other. Thus, North American mountains covered in snow and snow-angels, in a poem such as "The Empire of Snow," are also a site for the re-connection with the memory of a dead baby in Central America, who "dressed as an angel" rests "in a coffin the size of a large man's shoe" (*WDDL* 26). Moreover, in "Black Ibises," the scientific quest of the traveller-explorer cannot be easily separated from social and political elements that also inform the borders she or he crosses, not only because, in this particular poem, the speaker is "reminded that a foreigner, a biologist, / was kidnapped and beaten recently" (*WDDL* 59), but also because in her own searches she inevitably faces news of oppression, "*torture, violent death*" (*WDDL* 60). The position the traveller occupies is never in isolation from the context of the travelled space.

In one of the few Brazil poems from this collection, Conn re-reads this interconnection, challenging the traveller's quest, and also destabilizing the postcard framing of the Brazilian scenery. In "Amazonian Rain," the poet re-maps the rainforest's space in relation to its definitions as a "golden mine," which is not only due to its economical exploration, but also because of its attractiveness to travellers and explorers. By structuring the poem around the observations, feeling and sensations of the approaching traveller, who carefully notes every detail of her movement toward the vastness of the forest, Conn destabilizes the experience of the "Amazonian dream," as it is embedded in a series of painful recognitions regarding the state of the forest. In the poem, the traveller, in a "hard-packed red dust road / sun tormenting the idea / of the back of the neck" (*WDDL* 77) is enveloped in

> hot wind and dust and a new kind of human desert—
> the Amazonian Basin, the frontier,
> thousands of hectares of exquisite
> flora and fauna—
>
> except a lot of it has already been "disappeared" [. . .] (*WDDL* 77)

It is exactly this contrasting scenery, this pause in perception, this frustration of the travelling dream that invades the poem's tone. The traveller-speaker recognizes the transformation of space, through "fires and bulldozers and wealthy ranchers / and their hired gunman" (*WDDL* 77). In an interjection, the speaker reacts and is appalled:

> But there was a whole
> interconnected world here, intricate and complex,
> animals, plants and humans
> —and on all of them equally

> fell the green Amazonian rain [. . .] (*WDDL* 77).

At this moment, when reflecting on the past interconnections of every living organism in the forest, the speaker realizes that the same rain that used to fall over them now falls again, coming towards herself, but exposing a new set of relations,

> as the first drops
> let loose on the dead boa constrictor by the roadside
> and the noisy parrots
> clustered like feather dusters in the fruit trees
> and the lone Brazil-nut tree
> rising like a tidal wave
> above the grove of rubber trees
> and our upturned faces
> opening like flowers [. . .] (*WDDL* 77-78)

The rain, which releases the speaker from the "tormenting sun" and the covering "red dust," also releases a new image of the forest: with a boa probably killed by a car on the side of the road, with birds looking for the rarer fruit tress, and with the lone Brazil-nut tree still resisting the invasion of the more economically profitable rubber trees. Yet, it is also at this moment the traveller recognizes herself as part of this picture – her presence is also transforming it; the roads are not built for the native wild animals of the forest. In this recognition, the speaker addresses the falling rain:

> Wash away the red dust,
> the heat, the useless grandiose
> Amazonian dreams. For which, like gold fever,

there is no cure. (*WDDL* 78)

These final verses carry with them Conn's re-mapping of the Amazonian search. In her re-reading of the invasion of the forest, she does not necessarily exclude her own participation or interference. The definition of these dreams as "useless," since probably still embedded in the idealized reading of the space as "El Dorado," redefines the encounter; and in this context, the image of the "gold fever" seems particularly appropriate in its relation to exploration, domestication and even expropriation of the land.

In their critical reading of travel and travel writing, Holland and Huggan discuss the ambivalence of the genre since, at the same time it "frequently provides an effective alibi for the perpetuation or reinstallment of ethnocentrically superior attitudes to 'other' cultures, peoples, and places" (viii), it may also create an estrangement towards one's own cultural biases and "can be seen as a useful vehicle of cultural self-perception" (xiii). When reading Conn's reconstruction of the traveller's arrival in the Amazonian Basin, one notices a similar ambivalence. At the same time the poem could be read as the traveller's cry of desolation for the loss of the travelled space or for the destruction of the "native" or the "authentic," it also goes beyond that since it re-positions the traveller as part of external interferences and modifications of the land. Her presentation of the Amazonian region could be approached as what Conn calls "stereotypic and true-to-life" in her poem, "The Wooden Doors of Cochabamba." Such adjectives are used in the poem to define a "satirical play" (*WDDL* 74) the speaker attends when visiting this Bolivian city. In the play, "*el diablo* and *tío Sam* / manipulate a *campesino* to take his land / in a manner simultaneously / stereotypical and true-to-life" (*WDDL* 74).[17] Though carrying with it stereotypical simplifications of the new economical relationships been developed in the Amazon, such "reductionism" does not necessarily isolate the travelled space in a discourse of "loss of authenticity," but once more recovers the problematic nature of the crossing of borders.

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[17] *Diablo* and *tío Sam* could be translated from Spanish as devil and Uncle Sam, respectively, and *campesino* as peasants.

In poems such as "Amazonian Rain," Conn recognizes the complicities of the contemporary travelling subject with a tradition of conquest and exploration of new surroundings. Although she had already pointed towards this recognition in some of her first writings on Brazil, it is in the later poems that these interconnections become more poignant. Also, it is probably not coincidentally that these reflections are connected to the Amazonian basin. Even if she does present some new Brazil poems in *Beauties of Mad River: Selected and New Poems*,[18] I will focus here on two poems from the group under the title "Amazonia," which won the second prize for the 2003 CBC Literary Awards for poetry.[19] In this poetical suite, Conn more directly approaches the role of the contemporary traveller as a writer of the other. The first poem of this group is curiously called "Belém" as well, but this time it does not only talk about Pará's capital city. In this long piece, Conn addresses her experiences in different places in the north region of Brazil, such as Belém, Manaus, and Santarém, and she seems to present a new version of her reading (or re-mapping) of the land. In it, the traveller's position is destabilized since its very first stanzas, which read:

> The first aphrodisiac I tried was from
> the Ver-O-Peso market – not
> eye of dolphin or the powdered genitalia

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[18] Examples of new poems are "About Pará" and "Incident, Brazil."

[19] These poems are already part of Conn's new manuscript *Botero's Beautiful Horses*, to be released in the Spring of 2009.

of the giant river otter –
but some herbal drink, bitter and nauseating.
I was feverish, my face
bland as a cloud.

Nothing came of it.

Later the same week
on a dare I ascended all the worn stone steps
of the Basílica de Nazaré, my head tilted
to one side, whimsical, but something
took my breath away.
Something shone in the peacock sky
and my breath was stolen. (“Amazonia” 59)

In these verses, the frames of representation actually release the sense that, in the encounter with difference, there is no definitive answers to the travelling experience. The traveller’s *experimentations* with the other’s cultural practices through the drives of trying an exotic aphrodisiac from the local public market or of ascending all the steps of the *Church of Nazaré* “on a dare” provide no particular meaning to the subject, and actually challenge a potential controlled experience. The traveller is left, then, with instability and unbalance. In fact, throughout this poem, Conn’s representation of the traveller’s participation in local practices or tourist attractions (such as observing local animals, wandering around the main locations of the city or visiting historical buildings) shows how these "experimentations" fail to provide the traveller with any particular kind of privileged knowledge. There is even a certain void in these experimentations that unsettles the subject, and more than being able to attribute particular meanings to the other, she has to deal with her own subjectivity, re-negotiating her position in the travelled space.

In a second layer of this poem, Conn also complicates the position of the travelling subject through a questioning of the complicities involved in being a contemporary explorer. Recollecting some moments of the history of colonization and exploration of the Amazon region, Conn writes:

> Under the hot sapphire sky
>   at the cool hem of the Atlantic,
>   in 1616 the Portuguese arrived, in the name of their crown,
>   wearing leather and metal,
>   swords and helmets, and founded Belém. They arrived
>   and kept on arriving [. . .]
>
> Margaret Mee travelled here when I was four,
>   her small feet firmly planted
>   in the footprints of Richard Spruce and Adolpho Ducke.
>
> Now I stand overlooking the glinting water,
>   slick and moon-shot,
>   same night wind at my back, same moon. ("Amazonia" 60)

Obviously, Conn is not the first traveller to arrive in this new land, and her poem exposes the waves of different explorers that, through "swords and helmets" or "scientific treaties," transform and domesticate it. Her gaze at the glinting water reconfigures old and new meanings externally imposed on the region, and as the travellers who arrived there before her, she also demarcates new boundaries in the Brazilian space. Through poetical readings such as this, Conn rescues a historical archive of travel and exploration and inserts her encounters with the Brazilian other as also belonging to this same tradition.

However, what seems particularly significant in her writings is that, at the same time she recognizes these complicities with a discourse of exploration and colonization, she also attempts to resist such discourse by presenting a tension between the traveller-observer's perspective and the material existence of the travelled space. Aware that some meanings may be forever lost under the traveller's superficial gaze, Conn attempts to recover the hidden stories embedded in centuries of transformation and colonial domestication of land. As she writes in "Three Poems for the Rio Xingú,"

At times what the eye can see
the heart misses completely – so the green breast
of a hill across the cobalt slash of the Xingú

shorn of its primary forest
is filled with the plaintive cries of grasses
and the palms shine on
in the glaze and dazzle of noon,

the moon-white cattle wade
    up to their thickened waists
        in the resinous light. ("Amazonia" 61)

In this context, even if recognizing that her contemporary travel narratives are still embedded in the narratives of the past, she continuously excavates some of their hidden meanings. In her reading of the Brazilian landscape, Conn recovers the stories of transformation of this land, now filled with grasses for the grazing of cattle instead of its native vegetations. Through these underlying tones and the juxtaposition of different images, she resists enclosing the land in a new containing narrative, opening it up to its historical resonances.

In her poetical re-constructions of the Brazilian other, North and South America are re-connected through the subject's travelling body that, in the crossing of frontiers, recognizes how her observing gaze continuously frames territories and landscapes. Although her first portraits of Brazil are still authorized by colonial legacies, which allow the North American traveller to move South, re-discovering the Brazilian land, in her later poems (particularly in the poems on the Amazonian basin), Conn actually re-reads the complicity of the contemporary traveller with these same legacies. The tensions between traveller and travelled space become even more explicit in Conn's last book *Jaguar Rain: the Margaret Mee Poems*, in which she re-counts the journeys of this British botanical painter in the Amazon region. Journeying through Mee's restless quest, Conn also travels through the re-mapping of subjectivities. In the last considerations of this chapter I discuss how Conn's Mee poems can be looked as the poet's re-discoveries of her own poetics of travel.

Jan Conn's *Jaguar Rain*: Travel Notes Towards a Literary Poetics

Conn's sixth book, *Jaguar Rain: the Margaret Mee Poems*, could be described as a journey to unexpected worlds. Like Elizabeth Bishop who, according to Francesco Rognoni, would look at some of Charles Darwin's writing as poetical works (242), Conn also recuperates the literary and the poetical in Margaret Mee's writing on her expeditions to the Amazon.[20] Born in England in 1909, Margaret Mee moved to Brazil in 1952, living in this country for more than twenty years. She was a painter and a passionate admirer of the Brazilian nature, and became the resident botanical artist at the São Paulo Botanical Institute in 1960.[21] Mee undertook fifteen journeys to the Amazon region (between 1956 and 1988), exploring many of the Amazonian rivers, and painting mainly the local flora and its wild flowers. In her biographical notes at the end of *Jaguar Rain*, Conn writes: "[Mee] was the first botanical artist to begin to put exuberant background details into her formal botanical paintings. These serve as a reminder that whole ecosystems give rise to such diversity, species richness, and the critical need to preserve this extraordinary heritage" (*JR* 107). By recognizing the importance of this particular feature of Mee's artistic work, Conn also points out toward a direction to the reading of her own poetical constructions, be it in *Jaguar Rain* or elsewhere: in the process of re-mapping 'an-other' world, the attention to its interrelations and to the connecting threads that envelop both observer and observed is fundamental.

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[20] In "Reading Darwin – On Elizabeth Bishop's Marked Copies of *The Voyage of the Beagle* and *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*," Francesco Rognoni writes on Bishop's reading of Darwin: "In a single instance, the poet's ear seems to be scanning Darwin's prose into lines of poetry. Bishop underlines and separates with two slashes: '*In the deep and retired channels of Tierra del Fuego, // the snow-white gander*, invariably accompanied by his darker consort, and standing close by each other on some distant rocky point, is a common feature of the landscape' (200), sorting out a sentence that could fit perfectly [. . .] into several poems of another lifelong reader and admirer of Darwin, Marianne Moore" (242).

[21] My notes on Margaret Mee's life were compiled from both Jan Conn's biographical note on Mee in *Jaguar Rain* (107), and from the introduction to Margaret Mee, *Margaret Mee's Amazon: Diaries of an Artist Explorer* (Woodbridge: Antique Collector's Club in association with The Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, 2004) 17-19.

As Mee could be seen both as artist and naturalist, conservationist and collector, it is not hard to understand Conn's own fascination with this Amazonian explorer. Yet, although the book is chronologically structured according to the botanist's journeys mainly narrated in *Margaret Mee: In Search of Flowers of the Amazon Forest*, it does not necessarily recuperate many specific details about her personal or professional life.[22] In fact, the only group of poems titled "Biographies" is a sequence of literary portraits of Mee's plant sketches. Conn's focus is on this explorer's restlessness and on the interconnected details of her expeditions. Probably following Mee's own suggestion of representing the intricacies of ecosystems, Conn does not portray either Mee or her objects of observation in isolation. Moreover, it is through the juxtaposition of Mee's search up and down the Amazonian rivers and her own quest for the meanings embedded in travel and exploration that Conn is able to more deeply reflect on the unexpected recognitions of cultural encounters.

As a work by a botanical artist and explorer, Mee's Amazonian travels are in direct dialogue with previous exploratory narratives of the region, such as Alexander Von Humboldt's and Richard Spruce's (in fact, these are some of the names both Mee and Conn raise in their writings). In this sense, Conn re-inserts Mee's journeys as part of an archive of exploration and discovery, something which is even reinforced in the first section of her book, called "Antecedents." In this section, the archeological acts of collecting and classifying are recovered, framing not only a reading of the Amazonian region, but a reading of the very act of exploration. Yet, Conn's presentations of these "antecedents" are quite unique. Instead of repeating the de-contextualized discourse of museum displays, Conn imaginatively re-constructs the experience of encounter. "Near the Solimões River, 1880," for example, opens with a question:

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[22] See Margaret Mee, *Margaret Mee: In Search of Flowers of the Amazon Forest*, ed. Tony Morrison (Woodbridge, Suffolk, England: Nonesuch Expeditions, 1988).

> What would *you* do, she asked, if you came upon a man
> wearing eight black-necked red cotingas around his waist?
> Their heads and tails scarlet. Everything else glossy, buffed
> black. A bar tips the tail like a blackout over the eyes
> of torture victims in police photographs? (*JR* 17)[23]

This conversational tone and the sense of estrangement characterizing the direct question are actually defied in the second stanza of the poem, when the speaker responds to it by re-connecting with the experience of encounter itself: "As he walks toward me, a strange arrhythmic sound: snail / shell and animal bone on his chest rubbing together. The / feathers brush against me first, then other things. Bird feet, claws clenched" (*JR* 17). In these verses, the hypothetical encounter is concretized in the speaker's reconstruction of it, and the poem's effect becomes even more significant when, in reading Conn's notes, one realizes the poem is actually a re-reading of an indigenous body ornament, now located at the "Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna" (*JR* 97). In this re-reading, the observed object is not seen in isolation, but it is relocated in relation to its observer. The object becomes more than a mere artifact or a display, but it is actually re-enveloped by its historical resonances. It is in this context that Mee's journeys are presented in Conn's poetical writing. Recovering the stories of this female traveller, Conn once more attempts to read the silences or the voids left by the discourse of travel in its framing of the other.

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[23] Cotinga is a Caribbean and South American bird. In her notes to the poem Conn writes: "There are several species of cotinga (Family Cotingidae); this one is *Phoenicircus nigricollis*. Neotropical in distribution" (97).

It seems that one of the ways Conn finds to resist the stillness of representation is attempting to focus on movement and openness, or on the many elements surrounding the experience being represented. This resistance occurs from the very first poems on Mee's journeys. In "For the Giant Anteater," on Mee's travels in the state of Pará, Conn re-creates a sequence of images that enables the reader to experience the connections between traveller and travelled space. Some of the verses of the poem, which can be approached as imagistic units by themselves, read:

Heat slaps our faces, a wet sheet, under the massive mango trees
I trade my gouache for the giant anteater, its long viscous tongue
Pre-dawn, down a hundred wooden steps into thick mist, hidden river
[...]
When scarlet ibis float across the molten greens, suns also rise
We cross rapids: eyes wide open, swinging long bamboo, poling by heart
[...]
I cannot save the lemon trees from the woman with the evil eye
In the igarapé, euphonious bells of the lily chime, chime
Mangrove roots, black mud, little crabs—boiled on board in a blackened pot
Ticks desert the band of skinny pigs: on us grow fat as red balloons. (*JR* 28)[24]

In poems such as this, Conn does not over-narrate Mee's own journey, but recreates moments of perception avoiding their confinement in a 'grand narrative' of re-discovery.

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[24] Conn defines *igarapé* in her notes to the poem as "a small natural canal that may become dry seasonally" (98).

Through each verse, Conn presents the reader with more than the Brazilian scenery, but with Mee's experiences of it. In his review of *Jaguar Rain*, Harold Rhenisch argues that "[b]y setting the images separately like photographs in an album, Conn allows for the silences of the forest to move through the poem and allows the reader to participate in the act of their creation" (86). Although I do not necessarily read Conn's images as photographs in an album (I read them as more than mere snapshots of the observed object as they express the experience of the surrounding scene), Rhenisch's comment on the silences of the forest is indeed very precise. It seems that through her reconfiguration of Mee's positioning in the forest around her (on her re-connections with heat, mist, the sunrise, or even in her leave-taking read against the parasites that leave the bodies of pigs), Conn does create a space for the surfacing of a myriad of layers in the encounters between traveller and travelled space. Such layers, separate but dependent (as Mee's sketches of the plants and their symbiotic environment), challenge the confinement of the other inside a single narrative since they allow both the poet's and the botanist's experiences of these images to be discovered. In this context, traveller and travelled space become intricately connected.

Yet, even in this movement towards openness and experience, there is also tension and ambivalence; such ambivalence, as Conn seems to realize, can be hardly reconciled in narratives on travel and exploration. In "Why," for instance, Conn reconstructs Mee's sense of frustration in failing to be the first European to reach the summit of the highest Amazonian mountain, called Pico da Neblina.[25] By looking at Mee's narrative as still embedded in the ambivalent space of re-discovery, Conn is able to reflect on the many external and internal quests involved in the exploration of the other's "interiority." In the poem, the poet-explorer asks, why

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[25] Literally translated in Conn's book as Mountain of Mist (99).

weep when the path to the summit is washed out?
    Bromeliads relish the rain.
Why cry when food runs low?
    Giant earthworms make a great stir-fry.
[.............................]
Better to cry over the abandoned malocas,
    their families buried beneath our feet.
Better to weep on the way back down, knee-deep in mud.
    Send the hunters into the woods

for a votive termite nest to toss on the flames.
    Taste the amber smoke, the bitter smoke. (*JR* 47)[26]

In the representation of Mee's cry after her unsuccessful journey to the summit of Pico da Neblina, Conn brings to the fore the realization that what is best for the traveller may not be best for the travelled space. In Conn's juxtapositions of the hardships of the exploring journey to the indigenous houses abandoned and their families buried along the traveller's paths due to their contact with "outsider's illnesses" (such as measles or tuberculosis), discovery is once more questioned and challenged. In this context, the maps drawn by observer-explorers such as Mee or Conn are embedded in a constant tension between self and other, observer and observed. Their explored paths and rivers are, as Conn recognizes, "stained with the ink from my pen" (*JR* 73). Their connections are never necessarily free of conflict.

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[26] Conn defines *malocas* in her notes as "round communal houses with roofs and walls of palm leaves" (98).

In her encounters with Mee's journeys up and down Amazonian rivers, Conn is able to reflect on her own position in a prevailing discourse of exploration and discovery which pervades much of the writing produced on cultural encounters. Like Mee, Conn also restlessly crosses boundaries in North and South America, re-writing and re-representing difference. Yet, in her re-mapping of Mee's journeys, Conn is able to challenge the stillness of representation, since the travelled space is not necessarily fixed but actually permeated by the historical echoes that still define it. In looking at the connections between traveller and travelled space, Conn also destabilizes the travelling subject, since this subject is constantly changing and being changed by the travelled space. Like Mee's portrayal of the Amazonian flowers and their "background" details, which would emphasize the symbiosis or the relations of different elements in the same ecosystem, Conn also focuses on how spaces are constructed in relation to one another, and not in isolation.

In this context, Conn's encounters with the Brazilian other and her writing on travel echoes not only P.K. Page's re-discoveries of subjectivity and perspective in travel, but also Elizabeth Bishop's attention to the hidden stories that still inform re-readings of self and other. In their works, all three poets explore the connections of inner and outer worlds and how such interrelations inevitably affect and mould their own writing. As Conn's re-writing of Mee's journeys demonstrate, past and present narratives intertwine in the constant reconstruction of meanings in representation. For Conn, Bishop, and Page, travel seems to offer them a “door” through which they can re-map some of these meanings.

Conclusion – Travel and Poetics in the New World

One of the main questions that guided this present work was the relationship between travel and representation, or more specifically how, in particular historical and material conditions, travellers represent themselves and others in their cross-cultural encounters. This is, evidently, not a new question. As Casey Blanton argues in "Narrating Self and Other: a Historical Overview," narratives of travel have a "long history;" even if one only accounts for Western historical modes of representation, such history may date back to Herotodus's narratives of the Persian wars (1). Many studies, Blanton's included, have already tried to locate the relation between the self and the world, or how both self and other are positioned in Western thinking. While Blanton looks at this problem historically, examining the changing role of subjectivity in the history of travel narratives, Gisela Brinker-Gabler, in her introduction to *Encountering the Other(s)*, presents an account of different methodologies in the approach to the "question of the other/s" (1). Although my own reading journey does not necessarily share such a broad scope, it began with a genuine curiosity to look at the relations between self and other in the crossing of boundaries between North and South America, particularly through the literary discourses produced in these regions.

Probably as a result of having crossed those boundaries myself (from Brazil to Canada), I was interested in looking at how contemporary North and South American writers re-create or re-construct images of self and other in their cultural encounters, and how such re-constructions would still dialogue with narratives of the past (in particular with the colonial discourse of discovery and exploration). Originally, I planned to read a variety of literary writings on and from the two main axes I had set out for my research, Brazil and Canada. When I further explored the literary archives of the poets that constitute the main core of this present work (Elizabeth Bishop, P.K. Page, and Jan Conn), I encountered, as a reader, a new world in them. I was intrigued with their poetical imaginations about their travels in South America, particularly Brazil, and how this space became a site for their literary reflections on questions of travel. In their Brazilian encounters, these poets re-discover themselves as travellers and explorers of a new land, re-constructing and re-writing not only the travelled space, but also their own positions as writers of the other. Their works offered me, then, a significant space for a further reading of the relations between travel and representation, particularly considering what James Clifford has already called "the writing of cultures."[1]

In this context, the reading I present in this thesis is embedded in what Brinkler-Gabler defines as an ethnographical perspective to the question of otherness, "since it grapples with the ongoing process of constituting a self through an encounter with other/s" (3). In her re-reading of Michel Leiris's approach of the ethnographical text as construction, Brinkler-Gabler points out that, since the writer is left only with "traces" of the other, his or her writing is a "trans/lation," which is "always dependent on one's own cultural background, one's own system of perception" (3). Clifford's reading of the ethnographical endeavour follows this line of thought as well. Destabilizing the ethnographer's claims towards complete objectivity, Clifford suggests that, "[i]t has become clear that every version of an 'other' [. . .] is also the construction of a self" ("Partial Truths" 23). In this sense, for the critic, "[c]ultural *poesis* – and politics – is the constant reconstitution of selves and others through specific exclusions, conventions, and discursive practices" ("Partial Truths" 24). The "writing of culture" is approached as a construct and as a result of the exchanges between the encounters of self and other. In transposing this questioning to the particular context of travelling, Clifford also suggests a reading of travel "as a translation term" that can be "used for comparison in a strategic and contingent way" (*Routes* 39). Due to what Clifford defines as its "taint of location," travel as translation "offers a good reminder that all translation terms used in global comparisons [. . .] get us some distance *and* fall apart" (*Routes* 39). Thus, in the encounter with difference, traveller and travelled space are re-defined through a particular set of mediated strategies which constantly both approximate and distance one another.

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[1] One of Clifford's books on writing and ethnography (edited with George E. Marcus) is titled *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*.

It is in this line of questioning that I also read the travel encounters of Bishop, Page and Conn. Even if they are not necessarily what could be called "traditional" travel writers or ethnographers, since, as poets, they all construct fictional or literary accounts of their travels North and South the Americas, in this work I read their positions in Brazil as what Beatriz Badikian defines as "travel writers of sorts" (73) since "[they] journey through words to discover new worlds. And [they] journey through the world to create new words" (73). Thus, in their works these poets reflect on their encounters with Brazil and also construct images of self and other in the constant exchange of experiences in the travelled space. Moreover, they attempt to mediate their experience of the unknown and different other, translating and ordering it into words, at the same time that their own subjectivities are also challenged and re-created. In the space of travel encounters, these poets further reflect on their own modes of representation and on their poetical practices.

Nevertheless, despite the fact these poets' journeys enable a questioning of the "constructedness" of poetical representations, their writing on cultural encounters do not necessarily mean that travel is for them only a space for celebration and self-assuredness, or an "unproblematic" space. As Elizabeth Russell reminds us, "the identity constructed at the crossroads is not conflict-free" (xi). In Russell's introduction to a collection of essays on cross-cultural experiences, she focuses on the effects of different cultural crossings, particularly of female writers, emphasizing that, "[a]t times, the subject will see her position as a privileged one, and use her perspective of 'double vision' to gain a critical distance from both worlds and thus enrich her own life [. . .]. Or she may find herself 'caught between cultures,' feeling alienated from both" (xi-xii). Even if presenting a seemingly "schematic" view of cross-cultural experiences as privileged or non-privileged positions, the relevance of Russell's points lies in her focus on the complexities and ambivalences involved in the construction of subjectivities in the transgression of borders. More than merely opening a space for an unproblematic interplay between traveller and travelled destination, the crossing of borders is always a contested movement, which both maps and un-maps crossed locations. In the works of Bishop, Page, and Conn, for example, travel allows these poets to question and challenge notions of subjectivity, but it is, paradoxically, through travel that the objects of observation are also re-discovered and re-inscribed.

In this context, for the present work, travel is approached as both a potential form of cultural comparison, leading to the destabilization of boundaries and identities, and, at the same time, a practice that, according to critics such as Caren Kaplan, should not only be celebrated but also historicized. Thus, this work approaches Bishop's, Page's and Conn's writings on Brazil as a space for an analysis of the ambiguities involved in the acts of travelling and writing about cultural others. Though Brazil may not be seen as an automatic other in a North American context, these three poets' journeys to the country and their literary re-constructions of it represent a noteworthy part of their poetics. Approaching their encounters through what could be defined as the "unanticipated" space that Brazil represents for them provides not only an opportunity for a critical reading of their strategies to negotiate and represent difference but also for a discussion of how their poetics "coincide" or "speak to" each other.

When Page arrived in Brazil in 1957, Bishop was already living in the country for a few years. Though Page heard about Bishop's residence in Petrópolis, they never met, and as Page described in *Hand Luggage*:

> There she was, within reach,
> and I was too shy to approach her, for which
> I have kicked myself since. It was silly. I think
> it was talent that awed me, much more than crowned heads.
> Those I took in my stride. They were part of the job. (*HL* 63-64)

Acknowledging her admiration for Bishop, Page regrets not having met her in person when they were coincidently living in the South American country. Yet, even if they never physically met, Bishop's poetry left its impressions in Page's poetical imagination. In *Hologram*, her book of glosas, Page publishes "Poor Bird," which is inspired in Bishop's "Sandpiper." In her re-reading of the bird's obsessed quest, the Canadian poet writes:

> So the search began – the endless search
> that leads him onward – a vocation
> year in, year out, morning to evening

looking for something, something, something. (*HR* 2: 195)

As Kevin McNeilly suggests, this poem acknowledges Page's affinities with Bishop, or a "demarcation of poetic kinship, a provisional map of their common poetic yearning" (85-108). It also seems that Page recognizes in Bishop's writing a particular way of looking at the world that speaks back to hers, marking an interlocking of interests. In "Poor Bird," despite the bird's obsessive quest and the fact that "he has not yet found / what he doesn't know he is searching for / is not a sign he's off the track" (*HR* 2: 196); and as the speaker tells us, "when his eye is sharp and sideways seeing / oh, *then* the quotidian unexceptional sand is / *mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst*" (*HR* 2: 196). Page's poem could be approached as a re-reading of Bishop's sense of a "peripheral vision" captured in works of art, and discussed in her "Darwin letter." As if in an attempt to reflect further on the connections between the observer's eyes and her or his mediation in the transformation of the quotidian sand in the myriad of beauty, Page establishes a literary connection with a poet also renowned by her observational practices.

For McNeilly, despite the fact that criticism has already suggested the incompatibility of both Bishop's and Page's literary interests (mainly due to the kinds of poetical images each poet creates), in their writings on Brazil, both seek "a poetic of difference" (85-108) in which they "articulate a crucial notion of cultural difference by addressing [. . .] the unstable foreignness of the Brazilian landscape and culture" (85-108). Through their crossings from North to South America, both Page and Bishop attempt to reconcile the "surreal" or "dream-like" space Brazil represents to them with their own cultural backgrounds, even if the Brazilian difference defies representation. For McNeilly, it is exactly due to these poets' choice of looking at the instabilities of meaning provided in the encounter with difference that their "poetry of displacement" becomes an opportunity for "an ongoing rethinking of self and other, of cosmopolitan and local, of culture and border" (85-108). My own reading of the relations between both Bishop's and Page's writings goes along McNeilly's suggestions, but it also recognizes the fact that, even if destabilized, the other does get written, and it is through the intricacies of the relation between observer and observed in their representational practices that I approach their cultural encounters.

Almost thirty years after both Bishop's and Page's arrivals in Brazil, Conn started her physical and literary explorations of the country. In the bibliography for her collection *Jaguar Rain: the Margaret Mee poems*, Conn includes Page's *Brazilian Journal*, which was coincidentally published in the same year Conn received a writing grant for her trip to Brazil, in 1987. Also, even if Conn does not mention Bishop's works in her collection, in his review of *Jaguar Rain*, George Elliott Clarke points out Conn's "[u]nignorable [. . .] stanzas stuffed with startling observations" and her "deliberate diction [that] [. . .] echoes Nova Scotia's own Elizabeth Bishop" (15). For Clarke, "the echo is apt for Mee travelled the Brazil that Bishop loved" (15). Even if writing in a different time span, Conn's attentive observations of the natural world and her constant re-reading of the relations between traveller and travelled destination implicitly dialogue with both Page's and Bishop's poetical concerns. The literary quests of these three poets are marked by their experiences of travel, and Brazil becomes one of the spaces from where they re-map both inner and outer worlds.

In this sense, the experiences of Brazil enable the three poets to reflect more on their own modes of representation and on the role of art to translate the experience of difference. As North American poets crossing the Equator to South America, Bishop, Page, and Conn become particularly aware of their own limited perspectives as travellers and observers of an "unexpected" other, since Brazil opens to them a space of difference not easily contained in their representational frameworks. This "shock of recognition," which Anthony Grafton and his co-editors have already discussed in relation to the first European encounters in the New World, leads these contemporary poets to a re-reading of their own positions as writers of the other. In their attempts to write about Brazil, their language fails, and the idea of a mastering of experience is also questioned. Page, for instance, defines herself as a "mute observer, an inarticulate listener, occupying another part of myself" ("Questions and Images" 188). For Bishop, the recognition of the limits of representational modes comes with the realization that, in the encounter with the other, the traveller inevitably imposes her or his desires over the land, "superficially" approaching it, as the tourist of "Arrival at Santos," or "ripping it away," as the first European explorers in the land. In Conn's writing, the recognition of the returned gaze of the observer leads to a destabilization of perspective and to a constant tension between traveller and travelled space.

Moreover, through their crossing of frontiers in the so-called "New World," these poets' works can be read as part of an archive of travel narratives of exploration, which are still in dialogue with their contemporary readings of cultural encounters. Bishop recognizes her interest in the Brazilian natural surroundings and the narratives of exploration of writers such as Charles Darwin and Richard Burton. Also, while Page rediscovers herself as a "re-discoverer," who creatively annotates the "Brazilian difference" in her journal writing, Conn's poetry negotiates a tradition of travel and exploration permeated by historical or fictional heroes in search of newness and discovery. In this context, their very acts of covering geographical distances and reading spaces in the Americas become also a re-reading of how these spaces were constructed throughout historical discourses. The meanings embedded in such discourses still permeate their contemporary encounters with the Brazilian other, particularly regarding their readings of Brazilian nature and its associations with the dichotomy of civilization versus barbarism reinstalled in the discourse of the Americas.

In their writings on Brazil, these poets are, to some extent, re-visiting the discourse of "wonder," which Stephen Greenblatt defines (in his reading of colonial accounts to the New World) as "not only mark[ing] the new but mediat[ing] between outside and inside" or "between the designation of a material object and the designation of a response to the object" (20). In Bishop's writing, the Brazilian natural surroundings both dazzle and overwhelm the poet, who also realizes her own limitations in a mere appreciation of its beauty. Though recognizing the traveller's impulse to impose her or his own desires for the lush and exotic other over the Brazilian scenery (as her poem "Brazil, January 1, 1502 suggests), Bishop also attempts to challenge these same impositions by looking at Brazilian history and at its land as inhabited and historical. Through such look, she is able to reflect on the "presence of the past," which even leads her back to a re-writing of her personal Nova Scotia childhood memories. Moreover, in her poems on Brazil one is able to recognize a constant tension between the "fairness" of Brazil and its inhabitants. Through this tension, she further reflects on questions of subjectivity and observation. At the same time, she also re-inscribes Brazil in the ambivalent and paradoxical discourse of beauty with its problematic colonial legacies.

While Bishop's writing on Brazil offers an opportunity for the reading of history in the "weak calligraphy" of observed Brazilian details, Page's journal returns to the beauty of nature, re-inscribing her experience of the country as a re-discovery of its wonders. Experiencing Brazil from the Canadian ambassador's *palacete* in Rio de Janeiro, the "Brazil of P.K. Page" is full of uncanny encounters with flora, fauna, people and culture, which constantly defy the poet's ability to translate her Brazilian experience into words. It is exactly through such encounters that the poet's subjectivity is questioned, and in writing about Brazil, Page re-discovers her own self as also a constructor and mediator of images and experiences. In these re-discoveries, her poetical concerns are challenged, as she acknowledges the power of her own eyes, looking at the other, absorbing difference and re-creating it. Brazil is, for Page, an aesthetic experience, in which both poet and traveller collide to create "new" worlds.

In Conn's writing, the Brazilian natural scenery becomes once more a contested space. Her journeys in Brazil, as part of her own poetics of travel in the Americas, create a place for the re-discovery of the female explorer, recovering the silences embedded in a history of travel and exploration which primarily reflects a male and self-assured gaze. The re-reading of her personal quest becomes, then, a public re-reading of a traditional history of exploration. Her collection of poems on Margaret Mee's travels in Brazil seems to be a pivotal moment in Conn's recuperation of the relations between travel and gender in the re-construction of the traveller's subjectivity. However, Conn's poetry also points toward the recognition that the travelled space is not free of conflict. In the attempts to translate and "explain" experience, the traveller inevitably fixes the other in a particular frame of representation. Conn's writing raises this ambivalence and seeks to resist it by focusing on the observer's own role in excavating the hidden stories in the portrayal of the Brazilian land.

In their travel encounters in Brazil, Bishop, Page, and Conn confront their own positions as writers of the other. Their insistence on focusing on the subjective gaze of the traveller and on the "constructedness" or "unnaturalness" of their literary representations reflects their awareness of the ambivalences of representational practices as both a door and a frame for new understandings of the world (or, in other words, as both mappings and un-mappings of inner and outer realms). In the particular context of their writing on travel, such awareness also leads to an anxiety towards the axis of their movements in the Americas: a movement from North to South. Nevertheless, despite destabilization, these poets do write their Brazilian other, which once more becomes a re-discovered and re-written space in travel encounters. If this space is still ambivalent and permeated by questions of re-appropriation, it is in the critical reading of such space that one may recognize alternative ways to approach contemporary modes of cultural representation.

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